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BY JO PIERCE.

THE UNION SQUARE BAGGAGE BOY;

Or, Kris Chatterbox, the Pavement Guide.



"WANT YER BAGGAGE DELIVERED?" ASKED KRIS CHATTERBOX, BRISKLY.

The Union Square Baggage Boy;

OR,

KRIS CHATTERBOX,

THE PAVEMENT GUIDE.

BY JO PIERCE.

CHAPTER I.

A WAYFARER IN GOTHAM.

The Grand Central Depot!

New York has many features of interest, of imposing novelty, of bustling activity, but none that can eclipse the huge building which stands in its heart like a light-house to the land-voyager, and receives such a multitude of people every day.

Its bustle on the arrival or departure of a train is remarkable, and thousands of men, women and children hasten in and out of the great edifice.

Such was the scene one afternoon when a long train was discharging a small army of human beings it had brought to swell New York's population temporarily or permanently.

The crowd soon dwindled away and only those remained who, judging by their expression, seemed uncertain what to do.

Among these was a boy, of, perhaps, fourteen years. There was a crowd of persons who had come to meet the travelers; as each found the desired traveler and went away, the fact dawned upon the boy that no one was there to meet him.

His face grew serious, and he appeared like one wholly at a loss what to do. He was still in this state when he was approached by a boy about his own age.

"Want yer baggage d'livered?" asked the latter briskly.

The young traveler looked down at the old-fashioned carpet-bag he carried in his hand.

"No," he answered mechanically.

"I'm in that business—Rushton's Baggage Express; Kris Chatterbox, agent, Union Square. And Pavement Guide. That's me!"

"Do you know Mr. Dickinson?"

"No; he don't b'long ter our company."

"He lives in New York."

"Probably severial Dickinsons do."

"He's my uncle."

"Um! Come ter visit him, eh?"

"Eh."

"An' he ain't on time, eh?"

"He didn't know I was coming. Others were to meet me—I'm not sure he would be glad to see me."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"How be ye goin' ter find him?"

"That is just what I don't know."

"Probably the Directory will tell ye, an' if it don't you kin find a hotel."

"But I haven't any money."

"That's a cat o' different color."

A brief silence ensued, during which the boy who had given the peculiar name of Kris Chatterbox looked attentively at his companion.

There was a wide difference in the personal appearance of the two.

The traveler showed the most refinement, but not so much energy. He was a neat, plainly dressed lad who would be set down by all as a very good kind of a boy, and if he did not show much resolution, it was owing to his past life.

Kris Chatterbox was every inch a city boy.

Little did he know about the country, but the ways and by ways of New York he had been accustomed to from his infancy. Coarsely dressed he was neat and clean. His face was bright, frank and honest, and its natural plainness was offset by an abundance of black, jet hair.

It was Kris who broke the silence.

"Wot's yer name?" he asked.

"George Stoughton."

"Waar from?"

"Herkimer county."

"How did ye happen ter come down here?"

"I am trying to find out something about myself. I have always supposed I had no relations, and now I think there is something very queer that I don't know."

"That so?"

Kris somehow forgot that he was there on business, and felt very much interested in this outside case.

"I've always lived with old Stephen Matlock," George went on, "but, when he died, he told me things I did not know before. I'm all in a haze, but I hoped to find out about it by

coming here. Now I don't see anybody to meet me, and don't know where they live, or where to go."

By that time Kris had arrived at a decision.

"Wal, see here," he made reply, "it may be I kin help ye. Jest at present I ain't no time fur the job, fur, as I tol' ye afore, I'm agent fur Rushton's Baggage Express, an' won't Toby Bragg howl because I'm keepin' him waitin'! George Adolphus, foller me, an' I'll help ye out. Soon's we d'liver two or three trunks I'll be free fur the day, an' then we'll go ter my pariental roof an' take an account o' stock—an' deficits."

Nothing could be more cheerful than Kris Chatterbox's voice and manner, and the traveler caught at the offer.

If he had known more about the ways of New York, he would not have trusted himself to an entire stranger so freely, but it was a fact that he was perfectly safe with Kris.

The young New Yorker was as honest as any lad in Herkimer county.

The boys left the station. Outside, a red-faced man sat on the seat of an Express-wagon with two trunks just back of him. This was Toby Bragg, driver for Rushton's Express. Toby glared at Kris fiercely.

"Sa-ay, be you alive, or not?" he snarled.

"All alive, gentle pard," Kris blandly replied.

"Been takin' a nap?"

"No'p."

"Been delayed by an anti-quake fit?"

"No'p."

"Then what in thunder do ye mean by keepin' me waitin' here? Is time of any vally, or ain't it? Do I work fur money or fun? Ef I work for fun, how much on't do I get? Boss pays me poor wages, an' nobody has any feelin' fur me! I carry a trunk to a house, an' a woman says: 'Take it up-stairs!' 'How fur?' says I. 'Three flight,' says she. 'I ain't an elevator,' says I. 'Ain't you got yer pay?' says she. 'No, I ain't,' says I; 'my boss has got the royal sum o' twenty-five cents. What hev I got? Nothin'!'"

Mr. Toby Bragg glared at Kris even more fiercely than he had glared before.

"Then trains will be late, jest ter annoy me," he added, "an' now you will keep me waitin'!"

By this time the Express-wagon was under way. Toby was whipping the forlorn-looking horse which drew them, and giving no heed to George in his eagerness to growl at Kris. He was a confirmed growler, and nothing suited him, but his friends knew his weakness and never helped him to make a mountain out of a mole-hill.

Kris soothed him as much as possible, and then added:

"This boy is goin' with us."

"Can't I see he is?"

"Probably."

"Been playin' marbles while I waited, I s'pose. Nobody keers fur me!"

"He's goin' home with me, Toby."

"Let 'im go!"

It was a growl, but Kris was glad that his ill tempered friend did not oppose having George along. True, he would probably have been able to carry the day, for Toby was not bad-hearted, but it saved time to get rid of argument.

The trunks were duly delivered, though not without more grumbling from Mr. Bragg, and then Kris was at liberty.

He was never bound down to work. He had entered the service of Rushton at his own request, and had a special contract by which he used his wits to get work for them. At first he had been employed because he asked for but small pay, but he had been retained because he was useful, and the Express managers had been satisfied to increase his pay and let him use his own judgment as to how he would earn the money.

"Now," said Kris, when he had left the wagon, "foller me, an' we'll go ter the home-roost."

"Do you live far away?" George asked.

"Down on Twelfth street."

"Will your folks be willing?"

"Bet yer life. The fam'ly is small, anyhow."

Kris smiled grimly as he spoke, indicating that he saw something humorous in the situation. What that was became evident when they arrived at Twelfth street.

In a certain house lived Oliver Chatterton. He was only a shoemaker, and poor in everything except children. Of them he had an abundance—indeed, when asked how many there were, he invariably replied that he did not know. His neighbors could count nine, and as the father could rarely move without

falling over some of them, he never tried to take any from the number.

One of the hopeful lot was Christopher. All were bright and ambitious, and Christopher was not a rear guard. He had started in life, and made a name for himself in a double sense. Where one person knew his real name, a score knew him as Kris Chatterbox, and he almost always gave that name himself.

When George was taken into the Chatter house, he was at once impressed by the dance of small Chattertons, but none of proved obnoxious.

Kris told George's story, and the latter made welcome. The shoemaker was poor, he was also inclined to avoid meddling with other persons' affairs, but he was ready to get food and lodging to any one in distress.

Supper was eaten, and then Kris conducted his young friend to a private room.

"Now far a talk!" he observed. "Tell me yer story, an' let's see ef I kin help ye."

The late traveler was not reluctant. He felt the need of help, and Kris's quiet air of confidence impressed him deeply. It was as though Kris was several years his senior.

"I can't tell as much as I wish I could, but the facts are these: My name is George Stoughton, and I always have lived in Herkimer county with old Stephen Matlock since I can remember."

"He was a widower, but I can just remember when his wife was alive. He always used me well enough, though he never took much interest in me. He gave me enough to eat and wear, and sent me to school, but never seemed to care whether I eat or learned, or did anything else for my good."

"A few weeks ago he was taken sick and died, but while he lay on his death-bed he called me to him one day when nobody else was around."

"Boy," said he, "you think you are without relations, don't you?"

"You've always told me so," said I.

"I lied."

"As he said this bluntly, I looked at him in wonder, but he soon went on sharply:

"You've got an uncle in New York City!"

"Then why did you tell me otherwise?"

"The truth is not always spoken, young man. Look you, you remember my wife?"

"Yes," said I.

"The first time I ever saw her," he explained, "she came to this town carrying you, then a baby. No one here knew her. She came to board in my family, my mother then being alive. The first story she told was that you were her sister's child, sent out in the country for your health."

"In course of time I asked her to marry me, and she said she would if I still wished it when I had heard her story. She told the story. She said you were a child who was not wanted in New York, though she had no idea who you were; you had been handed over to her by persons strangers to her, who had hired her to care for you."

"Well, after I had talked with her she wrote to her employers, and, telling them she was to marry, asked what was to be done with you. The answer was that she would be given a certain sum, in cash, to bring you up and never meddle with the matter further."

"We had no idea who you were, so we accepted the offer, and that's how we happened to have charge of you."

"A reg'lar game o' villainy!" interrupted Kris Chatterbox, as George paused.

"Do you think so?"

"Think! I know it. New York is jest full o' sech cases. Villainy is thicker hyar than mud, an' it's clear you've got yer share o' the effects. But go on!"

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE CLAIMS AN UNCLE.

"MATLOCK and his wife used me as well as I could expect," George resumed, "and I never suspected that there was any secret. Once, before Mrs. Matlock died, the man who had paid them came to see her and me—though careful that I did not see him—and he came twice after she died."

"He was always very close-mouthed, and especially so after Mrs. Matlock's death, and they'd never got as much out of him as they knew, only that the woman got a few vague points before ever she took me away from New York."

"Matlock told me he had always felt easy in his mind about what he had done until shortly before he spoke to me; then, as death drew near, he began to have serious doubts. That's why he spoke to me, telling all he knew."

"First of all, my name might, or might not, be correct. Anyhow, I had an uncle in New York whose name was Dickinson, and the man who had always done business with the Matlocks was named Albert Grafton. Who the second man—the companion of Grafton—was, Matlock did not know.

"He advised me to write at once to Grafton. I told him that I was ready to claim my inheritance, and was going to do so; and, if Grafton agreed, I should like to have him help me along. He was the way Matlock told me to write, and I was a hint that I was bound to have my inheritance whatever it might be, and the safest way to get it was to turn in and help me.

"Matlock died, and I wrote to Grafton. I got a letter back right away, in which I was told to come on to the city by a certain train, and he would meet me at the depot. I came, and at you've seen that he didn't meet me."

Kris Chatterbox rubbed his nose and meditated. It occurred to him that, under the circumstances, they had been too hasty in leaving the Grand Central.

"Whar does Grafton live?" he asked.

"I don't know," George answered.

"Whar'bouts did you direct yer letter?"

"Only to 'General Delivery, New York.'"

"Hum!"

Kris shook his head.

The address told nothing.

"Would you know Grafton if you seen him?"

"No."

"Wal, about this uncle o' yours. I know one or two Dickinsons—though it's dollars to doughnuts, mebbe, that Dickinson wa'n't his correct name. W'ot was the first part?"

"Union—Union Dickinson."

Kris whistled.

"Say, I know of that chap!" he exclaimed.

"You do?"

"Yes. He lives only two blocks from hyar."

"Then take me there at once."

Young Stoughton was in a state of eagerness and triumph, but Kris did not follow his lead.

"How d'ye know he'll be glad ter see ye?"

"I don't know it."

"Ef he's given ye the cold shoulder fur fourteen years, or sech a matter, he won't rush an' hug ye, first-off, now."

"No."

"Better go slow!"

"Why?"

"He may prove an enemy."

"Anyhow, I must go there, see him, and learn just who and what I am."

"Better take a peccoloman along."

"My uncle wouldn't thank me for bringing an outsider into the case."

"Likely he wouldn't."

"Union Dickinson is a peculiar name, and this man must be my uncle. My proper way is clear; I must call upon him without delay."

"The past proves that he ain't no friend o' yours. What ef, once he got his hand on you, he should snuff out yer candle, so ter speak?"

"I'm not afraid of that."

Foolish as this reply was, it was not that of a boaster. George was not of the over-confident kind, but he was ignorant of the ways of the world. It was just the reverse with Kris, and, well aware that danger may be met at any turn in New York, he did not wish to see any such recklessness go on.

He proceeded to give George an accurate picture of some of the dangers of the town. These he might not encounter at Union Dickinson's, but, though the boy's past was a clouded book to him, it was clear that something must lie in the past of unusual interest.

If, as Kris suspected, it was a crime, another crime might be done to hide the first.

As for Dickinson, Kris knew too little about him to form any theory. He knew the man by sight, and where he lived, but that was about all. He was nearly sixty years old, tall and slender, and not ill-looking. Whether or not he was rich was a problem. He dressed in black garments which were out of fashion and a trifle seedy, but he did not work.

If he had an ill-gotten fortune—that was Kris's natural surmise—and George was the rightful owner, it was not likely that he would stand idle and see it wrested away.

All this Kris tried to make plain, but he met with no success. George was painfully eager to see his alleged uncle, and was not to be shaken in his decision.

When Kris saw this, he no longer urged the point. He had enough curiosity to wish to see how George would be received by Dickinson—and, indeed, the man was really the Herkimer county lad's uncle—and he did not oppose George's next idea.

"Can't we call upon him, to-night?"

"We might," admitted the Pavement Guide.

"I'd like to have it over with."

"I see."

"Will you take me there?"

Kris hesitated only a moment.

"Ef you say so."

"Then let's go."

Kris arose.

"I'll lead the way."

They left the house and walked toward Union Dickinson's. On the way the New York boy's apprehensions returned.

"I'd advise you not ter stay there, to-night."

"Why not?"

"Ef the old gent ain't friendly, you want ter mind yer eye."

"Of course I sha'n't stay if he's not friendly; but there's no use of hollering before we're hurt."

He spoke with impatience, and Kris let the matter drop with the dry comment:

"'Twouldn't do much good ter holler after we're hurt."

They soon reached Dickinson's house, and Kris rung the bell. He was somewhat annoyed to see that George exhibited much the same eagerness that he would have shown had he been sure of a friendly reception.

The door was soon opened by a rusty-looking servant who had only one leg.

"The boss in?" Kris asked, briskly.

"Yes."

"We want ter see him on bis."

"Come in!"

All this was apathetic on the part of the one-legged man. He did not regard them suspiciously, as Kris thought the servant of a villain ought to do, and the matter was beginning in an every-day fashion.

They were conducted to a parlor which was plainly, but comfortably, furnished, and there Union Dickinson soon joined them. Kris saw nothing new in his appearance—he was a tall, slender, intelligent-looking person in seedy black clothes—and he looked at the boys quietly enough.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?" he asked, looking at Kris.

The baggage-agent silently pointed to George with his thumb. Now that the crisis had come, the youth from Herkimer county evinced some embarrassment. He spoke in a faint voice:

"How do you do, uncle?"

Dickinson looked puzzled.

"I don't know you," he answered.

"I am George Stoughton."

"And who is George Stoughton?"

"Why, I—I am your nephew!"

"The dickens you are!"

The master of the house looked at the boy in what seemed to be profound surprise. Nothing like alarm or anger was visible in his manner, and George could not find words to answer.

"You will have to explain," Dickinson added.

"I've been told that you are my uncle," timidly observed the claimant.

"Do you believe it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

This was a conundrum, and George did not know how to answer it.

"Do you know Albert Grafton?" he finally inquired.

"No."

The boy's courage fell lower than ever.

"I've been living in Herkimer county with Mr. Stephen Matlock," was his next remark.

"You had better return to him."

"He is dead."

"I am sorry, for I should advise him to place you in an insane asylum, if he were living. As it is, I shall hold you responsible for your words, let them be what they may."

CHAPTER III.

THE SHADOWY HANDS.

ON one side of Union Dickinson's house was an alley. It led to an area not uncommon in New York. Pass the brick walls of the houses which bordered on the alley and one would see several modern structures. Men, women and children lived in them—people who laughed at their fellow-beings who lived in country places as greenhorns; yet these same ruralists stabled their cattle in barns better than the houses back of the alley.

Low, weather-beaten, tumble-down structures they were, yet they gave quarters to persons so poor that they were glad to get even such shelter. Poverty knows no choice, and its sharpest extremes are to be seen in large cities.

Lazarus Square some one had named the little space where the houses clustered. The sarcastic name was unknown to City Directories, and, perhaps, to the police, for, to the credit of the residents be it said, there was no occasion for the law to turn its eye upon the vicinity.

In one house—77, rear, so called—dwelt a family named Rollin. The head of the family was a sailor on an ocean steamer, and rarely at home. The other members were his wife, their daughter, Tuna; and an old colored man.

On the same evening before noticed, the daughter and the negro were the only occupants of the dwelling, Mrs. Rollin being away and engaged in her daily work of washing.

Tuna Rollin was twelve years old, but she might have passed for nine. She was very small, but not fragile; on the contrary, she enjoyed the rare good health which is often the blessing of the poor.

Nature had given her golden hair, blue eyes and a bright, arch face, and she was certainly a pretty child. When one saw how small she was, it seemed absurd that her real name was Neptuna—an odd name created by her sailor-father's fancy.

There was nothing fanciful about the negro's name; it was plain Jack. He was old enough to have white hair, and, as he was tall and strong, this head-covering gave him a certain air of dignity.

Both these persons were clad in the coarsest of garments, and that they carried no rags was due to the fact that abundant patching and darning had been done. Yet, in every way, they had the stamp of poverty upon them unmistakably.

Ever since Tuna could remember old Jack had been a member of the family. He had come directly after saving Tuna from drowning in the East River one eventful day, and grateful Thomas Rollin had thereupon opened his heart and home to the black man. But Jack had never been a dead weight; he had paid his way by working over the wash-tub, and had become a valued friend.

In Lazarus Square night was always gloomy. No lights broke the darkness except those in the four little houses, and these were dim. Tuna sat looking out of the window.

"No sign ob de missus?" asked Jack, as he looked into the tea-kettle.

"Not yet!" Tuna returned.

"She'll come primsuply."

"I wish Union Dickinson's house was out of the way, so I could see."

"Pity it ain't, wid him in it!"

"Why do you dislike him so, Jack?"

"Who said I did?"

"The evening after Kris Chatterbox was here, you said Dickinson was the meanest man alive, yet I never heard any one else speak ill of him."

"Who else has knowed him long's I hev? I lived in Lazarus Square afore your folks ever lived hyar, an' I knowed Union Dickinson. He kin now afford ter be decent, after he's—"

"What?"

"Done what he did."

"What was that?"

"Oh! wal, chill, you ain't old enough fur ter understand business ways, but I be, an' I know our neighbor, too. Precious quiet, he is; but de wu'st road adjutants kin afford ter reform arter they has robbed enough stages ter make demselves rich."

"Has Mr. Dickinson robbed anybody?"

"I didn't say so; I don't know's he ever did."

Jack evinced a desire to avoid speaking out on the point, but when his non-committal reply was followed by silence on Tuna's part, he finally added:

"Dickinson, he had a brother once, an' he didn't use him no ways right. Ef dat brother was a-mind ter turn ghost—he's dead—an' walk, he could make it right lively fur Union."

"What was done to him?"

"I don't jestly know, an' 'tain't no use ter rake up ol' scores," returned Jack, cautiously. "One thing I kin say, though: I'd hate ter be a chap Union was down on, an' git inter his power. I's heard stories tol' ob old houses belongin' ter murderous pusses what had trapdoors an' slidin' panels in dem; an' de folks would get their enemies inside an' den put dem out ob de way. I don't's'pose yonder house has sech contrivances, but I wouldn't sleep in it, ef Dickinson hated me, fur all de gold an' silver in New York. No, sah!"

The old negro warmed to his subject as he spoke the last words and gave Tuna the idea that their neighbor was a terrible man. This was news to her, for, cold-blooded as he seemed, she had never known him to do anything worse

than to ignore every one who lived in Lazarus Square.

Now, she was ready to believe him capable of anything, and would have shrunk back in fear from the window if he had appeared in the yard.

Some one did appear there, but it was Mrs. Rollin, and the little family was soon at supper.

Tuna retired at the usual hour that night. She slept alone on the second floor of the low structure, in a room where she could almost touch the ceiling when she stood erect, and where, in stormy weather, the rain pattered on the board roof so close to her that it played a tune that seemed to be for her special benefit.

Humble and poor the place was, but it was home to her.

Usually the girl was a sound sleeper, but on this night something occurred to break her rest. Some hours had passed, when she had a dream. She thought that she was in Union Dickinson's house; that he frightened her and she fled in terror; but her feet touched upon a trap-door like what old Jack had mentioned, and she fell down a pit, only to be caught and held suspended upon a hook; and then Dickinson bent over her, knife in hand, and was about to strike her when fear caused her to awake.

She sprung to her feet, but soon felt ashamed of her emotion and lay down again. She was thoroughly awake, however, and her thoughts would not turn away from the subject.

At last she arose, went to the window and looked out. She had felt sure that nothing but darkness would reward her, for the hour must be very late, but she was mistaken.

One room in Union Dickinson's house was all ablaze with light.

The curtain was lowered, and she could not see the interior, but, as she gazed, something unexpected and startling occurred.

A black shadow was suddenly thrown upon the curtain, which was of just the kind to show shadows distinctly. This was very distinct, and it appeared to be that of a boy—a strange fact, Tuna thought, for she had never seen any boy in the house.

One moment the shadow remained alone, and then a second—taller, and, beyond question, that of a man—was thrown beside it. The lesser shadow recoiled; its maker seemed about to flee, but arms shot out from the taller shadow and grasped the supposed boy by the throat.

Tuna uttered a startled cry.

The shadows were so plain that she felt as sure of what was going on in the room as though the tell-tale barrier had been removed, and her theory was enough to startle her, surely.

Only for a moment was there anything to see. The lesser figure struggled in the hands of the larger, and then both sunk down and the shadows vanished.

She watched eagerly for him to reappear, but saw nothing. Several minutes passed. The light had continued to burn as before, but it was at last turned low by unseen hands.

No shadow showed who had done it.

Tuna was in a state of nervous excitement. Perhaps twenty minutes passed, and then the creaking of some moving object drew her attention to the yard of Dickinson's house. The back door stood ajar, as was revealed by a faint light then burning within. A moment later and a man appeared in the opening, and upon his back he bore a heavy burden.

He closed the door and stood in the yard, but Tuna had seen enough to make her face grow pallid.

"Some one has been killed!" she whispered, huskily. "That is the body of a boy, and the murderer is going to hide it somewhere. Merciful Heaven! what can I do?"

CHAPTER IV.

A RECKLESS STEP.

KRIS CHATTERBOX plainly saw that there was going to be trouble when Union Dickinson addressed George so sharply, and he wished more than ever that the lad from Herkimer county had taken his advice and put in his claim more shrewdly.

If Dickinson was really his uncle, the fact that the tie of blood had so long been ignored was proof enough that no friendship was to be expected from him.

After a stern glance at young Stoughton, the old gentleman motioned to a chair.

"Sit down, and let me know the foundation of your absurd claim," he directed.

Kris felt more comfortable, but George did not seem similarly affected. He was worried, awed and alarmed.

"You say," Dickinson added, "that you are my nephew. I never had a nephew, but I will hear what you have to say. Proceed!"

"What—what shall I say?" George faltered.

"Tell me who you are."

As the country lad had already explained once, he did not comprehend what was wanted of him, but Kris Chatterbox came to the rescue, when he saw that George could not find words, and distinctly responded:

"He has always s'posed his name ter be George Stoughton; he has lived in Herkimer county with a sartain Stephen Matlock, now dead; an' the rest o' his hist'ry is w'ot he's lookin' up, ye see."

"So you're in it," muttered Dickinson, giving Kris a sharp look.

"In w'ot?"

"This game—whatever it may be."

"I ain't in no game!" retorted Kris, with some warmth. "I'm only lyar in pursoot o' my callin', my business vocation bein' baggage-agent an' Pavement Guide. Furdur than that, you'll hev ter deal with my companion; it's his picnic, not mine."

"Is he weak-minded?"

George flushed with anger.

"We'll find out before the affair is over," he replied. "I've been told that you are my uncle, and I'm going to find out all about it before I let the matter drop."

"Who told you all this?"

"Matlock."

"Why should he tell such an infamous lie?"

"I believed him."

"But I never even heard of the man. How could he know anything about my affairs? Intentionally or not, he deceived you ridiculously."

"You never had a nephew?"

"No."

"Did you have a sister?"

"Not one."

"Or a brother?"

"Yes. I had a brother who was named Ralph, but he never married. Such being the case, perhaps you can tell me how you can be my nephew."

The speaker had dropped his head and was looking at the claimant through his eyebrows, as it were. It struck Kris Chatterbox that this regard was not friendly, and he noticed, too, that Dickinson appeared more interested than he previously had been. Unless the Pavement Guide was in error, Union was studying every feature of George's face attentively.

As for the claimant, he looked dazed and helpless.

"Mr. Matlock told me to write to a certain Albert Grafton, here in New York, and I did so; and Grafton wrote me he would help me."

Dickinson's eyes glistened.

"Have you that letter here?"

"No, sir."

"I'd like to see the writing; it may be that of some enemy of mine, who is playing a trick on me."

"But he's the man who had charge of me before I ever went to the Matlocks."

"Oh! he was, eh? Boy, tell me all you know about the case!"

George obeyed. Puzzling as the case was, it was a short story, and he had soon laid all the facts before Dickinson.

The latter shook his head gravely.

"There is a mistake somewhere," he declared.

"How do you know?"

"Matlock may have been sincere, but he was deceived. That's certain. Somebody, from an evil motive, or by mistake, has made an unwarranted use of my name. However, I will take hold of the case and sift it to the bottom. You say you are a stranger here?"

"Yes, sir."

"And penniless?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall not suffer. I am not a mere philanthropist, but this accusation must be dispelled. Boy, you shall remain here to-night, and to-morrow I'll convince you that you can't be my nephew."

"Ahem!"

Kris cleared his throat vigorously, and with a warning note. He was growing more and more suspicious of Union Dickinson, and felt that it would not be safe for George to remain over night near the man.

His warning was not heeded.

"Thank you, sir," returned George, his face growing bright.

"I'll look up this Albert Grafton whom you mention, and either prove him a deliberate villain or get him to admit that he was in error."

"You are kind, sir."

"Allo'sudden!" muttered Kris, suspiciously.

"Very well; let it be settled that way. I'll give you a comfortable bed which shall cost you nothing."

"But he's goin' ter stop with me," put in Kris.

"Are you a relative?" asked Union, turning a sharp gaze upon the Pavement Guide.

"No."

"I met him at the depot," explained George.

"Then he has no claim upon you, and I you where you will be at hand whenever I leisure to take up the case."

"I kin bring him over 'arly in the mo."

persisted Kris.

"You are kind, my lad, but we'll not put to the trouble."

"It's kind in you, sir, to offer me quarter," affirmed innocent George.

Kris tried to give him the hint with a wink. When they were coming to the house he had warned the country boy that prudence forbade his sleeping there unless he was sure that he would be welcome, and, also, regarded as a friend, but George was hot on the trail, and anxious to make an impression on the man he hoped to claim as an uncle.

The fact that Dickinson had declared that such a relationship could not exist possibly was lost sight of for the time.

Finding that he could not alarm George by pantomime Kris again had recourse to words, but Union blandly overruled him, and the ex-traveler agreed to all that the man suggested.

The result was that George remained, and, battling with great reluctance and not a little fear, the Guide finally found himself alone outside the house, politely dismissed.

He looked back and shook his head.

"Fools an' villains abound in this yere world o' ours," he observed, aloud. "I've left one o' the first sort in that Bluebeard's den, an' I reckon thar's one o' the second sort, too. Ef George Adolphus lives ter see ter-morrer's sun tip Trinity steeple with yaller, he'll be lucky. Darned ef I don't b'lieve the old gent is goin' ter get away wid him!"

The New York boy was fully in earnest. It had been a rash accusation when he spoke ill of Dickinson before they reached the house—though based upon his knowledge that a person must look out for himself in the city—but he had more substantial grounds now.

Dickinson's sudden change of base was suspicious.

"Wants George Adolphus ter stay in the house, does he? Wal, G. A. was a mighty foolish chap fur stayin'. Them's my sentiments!"

Again Kris shook his head, and he continued to gaze at the house for some time. He was reluctant to go away. He had been courteously bowed out by Dickinson, and without remonstrance from George, but he disliked to leave the boy to meet the events of the night.

Once he thought of speaking to a policeman, but he rejected the idea as absurd.

Dickinson passed as a respectable man, and the mere fact that he had given a homeless boy shelter for the night was not enough to make an officer investigate the subject.

"Sartainly not!" Kris decided. "All I kin do is ter go home an' let the game go on. It may be I'm foolish, an' that George will really hev good usage there—though I can't see it in that light. Wal, I only hope the boy will come out on't with a whole hide, ter-morrer!"

The Pavement Guide went home and retired. The next morning he did not report to go on the baggage-wagon with Toby Bragg, but, as soon as he thought it would be advisable, he went to Dickinson's house.

He rung the bell, and the one-legged servant made his appearance.

"I want ter see the boy," observed Kris.

"There ain't no boy herel" was the ready reply.

CHAPTER V.

SUSPICIOUSLY MISSING.

KRIS looked at the servant in surprise.

"I mean George Stoughton," he explained.

"No sech person here."

"Didn't a boy stay here last night?"

"Yes."

"He's the one."

"Well, he's gone."

"Gone?"

"That's what I said."

The Pavement Guide regarded the one-legged man with all of his fears again active.

"Where's he gone?"

"Don't know. You'll hev ter ask the boss."

At that moment Union Dickinson came

into the hall. He nodded calmly at sight of Kris.

"So it's you?"

"Yes. I've come ter see George."

"The boy has gone away," Dickinson composedly announced. "A man called this morning and asked for him; they talked for a while at the door; and then the youngster went off with the man, never offering any explanation. Whether he intends to return I can't say, but I expect that he does not. Say, isn't there some queer about this case?"

"Yes. I've been looking to see if anything is missing, not having the highest opinion of young Stoughton's honesty; but have thus far failed to find any signs of light-fingered work."

The master of the house spoke calmly and to the point, and if he was acting a part, he was doing it well; his manner seemed sincere enough.

But Kris remained an unbeliever, and the idea was strong in his mind that there had been harm done to the Herkimer county lad.

"Why should he go away?" was the mechanical question.

"I don't know."

"He didn't know a soul in New York."

"Such was his claim. What proof have we of it? Certainly, he would not go away with a stranger. Whoever the caller was, he knew that Stoughton was here and asked for him by name. I think the boy played a game to get a night's lodging."

"I don't!"

"No?"

"He was square, George was; an' ef he has vanished myster'us, thar has been foul play done; that's all!"

"He went willingly."

"Mebbe!"

Kris looked more closely at Dickinson's face, and, despite the man's bland manner, that face seemed to grow evil and forbidding. The Guide had been afraid that harm would come to George, and if that very thing had not come to pass, he was greatly mistaken.

"That is all," Dickinson added, after a pause. "Stoughton may return here, in which case, if he can convince me of his honesty, I stand ready to fulfill my promise and help him all I can. On the other hand, my impression is that he is a fraud, and that you and I commit an act of folly in placing confidence in him. Good-day!"

The speaker stepped back and closed the door, and Kris was left alone on the steps.

He stared hard at the door. The interview had ended unsatisfactorily, but he had as soon look at the door as at Dickinson.

"Let him go—no use o' wastin' words. Whatever he's done, it's over with, now, an' I can't git no light by harpin' on the subjick. I'll go home an' think it over."

He descended to the sidewalk, and then stopped and looked at the alley.

"Guess I'll look in at Lazarus Square," he added.

Several years before he had made the acquaintance of Thomas Rollin, and the sailor had taken such a fancy to him that Kris had been taken to No. 77, rear, and an intimacy had begun which was pleasant on both sides.

He now passed through the alley, went to the Rollin house and opened the door without stopping for ceremony.

Tuna, the only occupant of the kitchen, greeted him with a bright smile.

"Oh! is it you, Kris?" she cried, cordially.

"I ain't any reason ter s'pose it's anybody else," returned the Pavement Guide, seriously. "Ef I'm perambleratin' in any other chap's shoes an' hide, I ain't heerd on't."

"How absurd you are, Kris."

"You don't say!"

"No wonder they call you 'Chatterbox.'"

"Now, see yere, Miss Rollin, don't cast no aspersions on my pet name. A man without plenty o' words ain't o' no use in this yere world. Patrick Henry, Dan'l Webster an' John Jefferson all was ready speakers, an' they all got ter be Presidents, d'ye mind?"

"No, I don't mind; for they didn't. Only Thomas Jefferson was President."

"Is that any sign I sha'n't be one?"

"No."

"Course not," and Kris swung his right hand in a dignified circle. "But that ain't ter the p'int. I've jest called on yer neighbor, U. Dickinson, Esq."

Tuna's face assumed a startled expression.

"You don't mean it!"

"Why not?"

"You're lucky to get away alive!"

"Am I? Wal, I never got away any other fashion, yet, from nowhere. But what d'ye mean, Tuna? What do you know about Union Dickinson?"

The girl looked around to make sure that no other ears would overhear what she said.

"Kris, there was something terrible happened there, last night—but mother and Jack won't believe it. They said I dreamed it all."

The Guide's eyes sparkled with eager interest.

"What did happen thar, last night?"

"I had a bad dream and woke up," explained Tuna, rapidly, and with great excitement, "and then I went and looked out; and I saw a light in an upper window of Dickinson's. The shade was down, and pretty soon a shadow was thrown upon it by some one inside, and I saw that it must be a boy—"

"That was George!" cried Kris.

"And then another shadow appeared—a man's—and I saw his arms shoot out, and he grabbed the boy by the throat—"

"Great Scott!"

"And then both disappeared. They seemed to drop down on the floor, and I didn't see any more of them. Pretty soon the light was turned low. Then, after awhile, I saw the back door open and a man came out carrying a boy on his shoulder—"

"That was them!"

"But I only saw them a moment. The man went behind the high board fence of the yard, and that was the last of it. I watched a long time, but not a sign did I see; if the man came back, I didn't see him. I knelt at the window too frightened to move, and actually fell asleep on my knees. When I woke up it was daylight. I told mother, and Jack about it this morning, but they said it was all a dream—"

"It wa'n't. 'Twas true."

"How do you know?"

"He's killed George."

Tuna uttered a startled cry.

"Oh! Kris!"

"At least, I b'lieve so," added the Guide, taught caution by her alarm.

"But who is George?"

"A comrade o' mine. Come down from Herkimer county, ye know. Yes, sir; old Dick has got away with him, sure!"

Tuna was more frightened than ever, but her questions were to the point, and she soon succeeded in getting the whole story. Then she quite agreed with Kris in his view of the case, and spoke of the vague hints given by Jack.

"I must see that colored gent!" declared the Guide, with emphasis.

At that moment old Jack entered the yard, and he was soon in the hands of the young people. Both were anxious to talk, and both did talk, and between them they soon had the negro so confused that he could find no coherent words himself.

Finally, however, he was made to understand that they wanted all the information he could give about Dickinson and his past.

"Wal, my young frien's," he made reply, "I ain't a gentle'um dat b'lieves in spreadin' scandal, rumors, conspiracies or infamies, but I kin tell you 'uns something about dat man."

"He had a brother, Union Dickinson did; an' his name was Ralph. There was a right smart difference in their ages, Ralph bein' de youngestest by some considerable."

"He was a nice, lively sort o' a chap, an' when he was erbout twenty-two year ol', ebery one was surprised ter hear dat he had turned in—ter a ray-close."

"W'ot's a ray-close?" Kris asked, in wonder.

"A harmit," Jack explained, with great dignity.

"He means a recluse," added Tuna.

"Dat was perzackly de word I used, an' Dan'l Webster's dictionary sanctions 'um—I guess. Anyhow, Ralph Dickinson disappeared from public view all ob a suddint!"

CHAPTER VI.

DANGER FOR KRIS.

OLD Jack paused and wagged his head with an air of extreme wisdom, as though to convey a good deal more than his words revealed.

"How'd he disappear?" Kris Chatterbox asked.

"Into de house. Nobody seen him abroad, so dey inquired fur him. Said Union Dickinson: 'My brother has taken an odd fancy fur close appellation ter study, an' he spends all ob his time poring ober vollums in his room, an' won't see nobody but de sarvint.'"

"Gammon!" commented the Pavement Guide.

"Jes' w'ot de folks said, after a bit, an' de ijee got abroad dat Ralph was 'off' in his upper

story. He'd been too gay a lad ter turn student an' hermit, an' nobody thought it on him."

"Wasn't there wu'ss s'picious afoot?"

"Not until it was knowed dat Ralph was dead, but when folks was invited ter his funeral, dey all said it was mighty queer. Dere was talk ob an investigation, but it never was made. I've heerd it said dat Union hushed it up."

"Jack, w'ot do you think?" Kris asked, gravely.

"It's my idee dat Union shet his brother up, an' let him die there!"

"Why? Money?"

"No. Dere wa'n't enough ter fight over."

"Why, then?"

"A woman!"

"Ah! how's that, my frien'?"

"There was a gal named Elzira Cook. She was a shop-girl, poor an' pretty. Once, Union, he had a fancy fur her, an' it seemed she did fur him. Blessed few knowed on't, fur whatever fancy she *did* hev, was short-lived. Union didn't court her open enough ter hab it ginerally knowed. Good reason why—she wouldn't let him."

"Showed her good sense."

"Prezackly. Wal, sah, next thing, 'long come young Mr. Ralph. He seen her, an' surrendered his heart, too. I's seen 'em tergether, myself, but I reckon dey was afeerd ob Union, fur they always had a secret sort ob a way, an' she seemed troubled an' skeered."

"When Ralph wanished into de house, Elzina she wanished elsewhere. Went right out ob sight myster'us—but she wa'n't killed. Oh! no; she was seen around both afore an' after Ralph died."

"Whar she'd been was oncertain, an' I kin only give ye de facts as aforesaid."

"But you've got a theory?" questioned Kris.

"I hab."

"W'ot is it?"

"Ralph got ahead o' his brother in de race fur Elzina's 'fections, an' Union jest clapped a heavy hand on both an' got 'em susperated one from another."

"D'ye s'pose they was married?"

"Prob'ly not."

Kris did not agree with this view of the case. To him it looked that Ralph and Elzina *had* been married, and that Union's anger when he knew the facts had led to his crime, or crimes. As for George Stoughton, Kris thought there could be no doubt that he was the child of that marriage.

This did not necessarily mean that Union knew of his existence. Possibly when Elzina disappeared she had gone of her own free will, to escape Union, and that he had never heard of a child until George so rashly claimed relationship.

"W'ot finally become o' Elzina?" the boy asked.

"I don't know; she drifted out o' sight. I ain't seen her fur a dozen years, an' don't know whar she went."

"Did ye ever know a Albert Grafton?"

"No."

"Or Roxanna Gray?"

That had been the name of the woman who had carried George Stoughton to Herkimer county, when he was an infant, and who had subsequently married Stephen Matlock; but Jack answered without hesitation that he had never heard of her.

It seemed to be a blind trail.

There was now abundant ground for suspicion, but how was it to be verified? As much as Jack knew about the affair, he could not suggest any person to whom Kris could apply for information. He had but a vague idea of who had once been the associates of the Dickinsons, and the lapse of years had made changes.

Union had left his old neighborhood, and had for some time lived a very retired life.

Jack was not inclined to fall in with Kris's theory that George Stoughton was Ralph's son, or even that harm had come to the boy. As much as he disliked Union, he thought that it was more than likely that George had been a fraud, and had gone away as the old man had said.

Tuna, however, accepted the Guide's theory readily, and was sure that she had seen a part of a tragedy—or its shadows.

One question was not easy to answer. If Union had carried George out into the yard on his back, what had been the object? And if the boy had then been lifeless, what had been done with his body?

Kris run the risk of placing a box next to the fence and looking over into Dickinson's yard, but could find no explanation of this puzzle.

There was no visible place where a body could be secreted above, or dropped into a recess below the ground.

"An' he wouldn't never hev put evidence o' his crime over inter another yard," Kris decided, very reasonably.

"Then what did he do with it?"

Tuna asked the question, but neither Jack nor the Guide answered. They were wholly unable to arrive at a conclusion.

However, Kris was not content to let the matter rest. He determined to allow Tony Bragg to run the Express wagon alone, that day, and look further into George Stoughton's case.

His next step was to find some one on the street whom he could question, and this he succeeded in doing in the person of an Italian who had a fruit-stand nearly opposite Dickinson's.

Kris began work at once.

"How's biz?" he asked, after making a purchase.

"Poor," was the dolorous reply.

"Have ter git on duty early?"

"Yes. The early bird-a ketches the worm-a."

"Correck! D'ye see that house 'cross the way?"

"Yes. Want-a to buy?"

"Nary! But did ye see a boy come out o' thar early this mornin'?"

"A boy, he stand a-on the steps an' talk-a with a man—"

"What fur a looker was the boy?"

"He was about-a your size, an' he have-a on some coarse gray clothes and a soft brown-a hat. He look-a like a country boy."

"Hum! Sure 'twas this mornin' you seen him?"

"Yes."

"How did the man look?"

"He was a tall man, with a brown suit of clothes, and-a he had a scar on his right cheek."

"Don't know him. W'ot did they do arter talkin'?"

"They came over here a, and the man bought some fruit; then they went-a away down that way. They were going to-a Stanton street."

"Did they say so?"

"Yes. The boy, he say-a: 'Let me go and-a see Kris first'; but the man-a, he say: 'It is only a short ways we have-a to go; let us go-a there first, and then come back.' The place was Number — Stanton street. I heard quite-a plain."

Kris was exultant. What seemed to be chance words spoken by George and an unknown companion had given him a clew, and he determined to improve it. In his excitement, he neglected to inform Tuna and old Jack, but set out for Stanton street at once.

He was barely out of sight when a man came out of the house back of the Italian.

"See here!" he cried, "what do you mean by setting-up a stand on my sidewalk?"

"Me sell a fruit."

"You won't sell it here. You've got to have a permit, and that you haven't got and can't get! I won't have you loafing around on my sidewalk. Now, you get out immediately!"

He was angry, but the Italian remained humble.

"I am a poor man—"

"No matter. Get a—"

Meekly the son o' Italy obeyed. His goods were on wheels, and he moved the whole affair to the street proper and then trundled it away to the east. After going three blocks, and turning a corner, he came upon another Italian who was lounging on the sidewalk.

"Here is your property," said the first man, in his native tongue.

"Are you done so soon?"

"All done."

"Did you sell anything?"

"Not a thing. What do I care? I am not a fruit-vender, if I have passed for one for a few hours. Here is five dollars for the use of your goods, as agreed upon. Now I leave you, for I have work to do on Stanton street. Fare-well!"

And he hastened away.

If Kris Chatterbox had seen and heard all this, he might have seen something suspicious in it—seen evidence that he was the victim of a plot, and was being lured into danger.

Having no clew to the scheme, he was without a doubt, and was even then en route to Stanton street.

Reaching the number which had been given him, he rung the bell.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FEE IN THE REAR.

THERE was nothing about the house where Kris Chatterbox made application to distinguish

it from its neighbors. It was of brick, and was old and rusty, but rusty brick houses are numerous in the metropolis. True, this particular house showed neglect—one corner had sunk the fraction of a foot, causing the bricks to heave a trifle and get out of line.

This, however, was another common thing, and there was positively nothing to tell the Pavement Guide that he was going into danger.

An aged woman of respectable appearance opened the door.

"Ma'am," said Kris, "allow me ter ask ef thar is a boy here named George Stoughton?"

"There ain't," she replied; then, seeming to have an idea, she added: "Do you mean to ask ef he lives here?"

"No, fur he don't live here; but has he come in the last few hours?"

"There is a boy here wid Mr. Snow, but I ain't heard his name. 'Jim,' and here she raised her voice, "who's de boy wid de lawyer?"

"George Stoughton."

"That's the gent!" declared Kris. "Ma'am, will ye be so kind as ter say ter George that I want ter see him a jiffy?"

"He's busy wid Lawyer Snow, a-drawin' up some law papers. You jest step in where he is—it's the front room here—an' you can talk all you please when he's ready."

It sounded like a frank and friendly invitation, but Kris was wary. He did not want to put his head into any trap, and he had no proof that the house was a safe place for him.

"I'll wait hyar," he replied.

"Nonsense! Don't be bashful; come in wid yez!"

"The street is good enough fur me, an' George kin find me when he comes out."

The Guide was determined to stick to his resolution, but it was through prudence rather than suspicion. The old woman was not the person one would connect with crime, and her face bore a good-natured smile.

As the boy made his answer, however, there was a sudden change in the situation. He had been careful to keep his face toward the door, and to watch that place for danger, but he had not seen an ill-looking fellow who had come along the sidewalk and loitered behind him.

This fellow had listened carefully, and, when Kris made his last statement, the stranger sprang forward, swung his arms around the boy, lifted him and darted into the house.

All this had been done too suddenly for the Guide to have a chance to resist—hardly to think—and when such a chance was given him he found himself in the hall with the door closed and locked.

He looked blankly at the ruffian who had captured him, and then, after a moment, his face flushed with anger.

"Say, w'ot's the meanin' o' that!" he demanded.

"W'ot's de meanin' o' w'ot?" was the surly reply.

"W'ot d'ye mean by yankin' me in hyar?"

"You're wanted."

"By you?"

"You'll see, later."

"No, I won't see. You jest stand out o' the way an' let me pass!"

Kris advanced toward the door, but the man barred his way.

"No, ye don't, younker! You're in ter stay. Now, don't ruffle up yer feathers an' look so like a bantam, fur it won't do any good. You're a prisoner! Understand dat?"

"Why should I be a prisoner?"

"Because you're a sneak. You come here ter kick up a row, an' you shall hev all you want on't. Believed the Italian, did ye? Wal, you may as wal know, right away, that he was sent there to decoy ye here!"

"Don't tell too much, Tim," cautioned the old woman, whose face no longer wore a friendly expression.

"W'ot's the odds? The kid can't get out ter squeal."

Kris was silent for several seconds. The truth had become apparent to him, and he saw that he was trapped, but there was still a good deal of mystery about it. Why any one should want him was a problem he could not solve.

"Now, younker," the man Tim pursued, "you come up-stairs wid me."

"I won't go a step!"

"Then I'll carry ye!"

He laughed slightly, and advanced upon the luckless Guide. The latter was courageous to an extreme, and he faced his enemy boldly. He tried to get in a blow on Tim's whisky-colored face, but not because he really hoped for success.

He was not successful; Tim evaded the blow,

and then wrapped his arms once more around the Guide and carried him up the stairs. As he was twice Kris's weight, it was an unequal struggle.

In a short time he found himself deposited in a rear room on the third floor.

"Here we be!" Tim observed, less brutally.

"As far as I know you ain't ter be hurt, but stay here you must."

"Why?"

"That's orders."

"From whom?"

"Never mind; it's somebody I shall obe the letter. Got ye neat, didn't we? The It was set ter act as decoy, an' he got away ye n'ately. You walked inter the trap like lamb."

"I didn't!" flashed Kris, quickly. "I didn't intend ter come inter this house, an' I couldn't hev been lured in; but you gobbled me from behind. It was a cowardly thing to do, an' I'll live ter be square with ye!"

Tim surveyed the captive thoughtfully.

"You did show caution," he admitted, "an' I reckon you are a fly lad. All the more reason fur holdin' on ter you now. Well, I'm off. This is your prison. Food an' water you shall have, but you'll find you can't get out. So-long!"

"Hold on!"

"Well?"

"Is there another boy here?"

"Ain't seen or heard o' any."

"Know a boy named George?"

"No."

Tim spoke the last words on the threshold, and then went out, closed the door and locked it. Kris was alone in his prison-room.

What the room looked like he did not yet know, nor did he at once turn to look; his mind was too busy.

"This is Union Dickinson's work!" he muttered, indignantly. "He lied when he said that George went away with a man, an' got the Italian ter back him up in the lie. Why? What fur, unless he has made way with my poor Herkimer county pard, an' wants me out o' the way so I can't tell on him? By jinks! that chap is a bad one, an' he's got me in hock, sure pop!"

He turned to survey the prison by the light of the gas.

Originally it had been a room of very ordinary kind, but in the hands of its present possessors the scene had changed. The single window was covered with planks, and these, in turn, had been fixed in place with spikes, the heads of which were large enough to certify to the length and strength.

A secure-looking prison it was, and Kris shook his head as he looked it over.

"No snap, the job o' gettin' out. They ain't done their job by halves, an' it would take a right smart earthquake ter shake down the walls. Oh! Jurusha K. Jackson, ain't you in the meanliest kind o' a fix, Mr. K. Chatterbox!"

Misfortune could not overwhelm his usual high spirits, and he continued in a humorous vein:

"Ef they keep me hyar I won't never hev my epitaph written. Head-stones ain't often set up whar nobody is buried, while, as fur the daily papers—well, it ain't facts that they publish, nohow. Chatterbox, you may as well throw up the sponge, right off!"

Instead of doing as he said, he set to work to make a minute examination of the room. The window and door certainly appeared to be as firm as they could be made, and they could not be forced without suitable tools to do it with; and he had neither brought any such implements, nor did the contents of the room furnish any.

Only the walls remained.

He studied them for some time, but was of the opinion that, even if he succeeded in passing out, he would not be much better off.

"Ef I's only on the roof, now!"

He muttered the words wishfully. Nothing but the roof lay between him and liberty—nothing but the roof, but that signified a good deal. It was a barrier hard to pass.

Kris was a boy of ideas and stratagems, and he sat down and fell into thought. He carried a stout pocket-knife. Was that sufficient for him to cut his way out with?

He had no very clear idea of how strong the roof would be. Certainly, an ordinary ceiling could be cut through in time.

Despite the fact that he had serious doubts in regard to the upper layer, he drew his knife.

"I'll try it!" he decided. "Union has made way with George, an' I'm wanted fur evidence. I won't stay penned up like a rat; I'll cut my way out, ef sech a thing is possible!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GUIDE GETS A TUMBLE.

NIGHT had fallen, but Kris Chatterbox had no means of knowing that such was the fact. In his prison-room all times of day and night were alike; the place would have been in utter darkness had it not been for the gas his jailers had allowed to burn.

For hours he had worked as steadily as possible, and not without result. Selecting a point where the ceiling and wall met, he had used his pocket-knife until, at last, he found an open space through the former, and a gap above.

The fact that this was higher than he had expected was not in keeping with the theory that the roof was just above, but when he had put his head through, he learned why this was so.

The roof was not perfectly flat, but sloped back slightly from the street. Thus, while it met the ceiling of the prison-room at the rear, there was a space above where Kris stood large enough to admit of his passage.

Anxious to see what was beyond, he ignited a splinter and held it out as far as he could.

The result filled him with exultation.

A rough, unfinished passage was revealed, and at the further end a ladder, which plainly led up to the top of the building.

"Hi-yi!" the Pavement Guide muttered, in delight. "Ef I ain't out o' this in a jiffy, it's 'cause I'll git interrupted."

The possibility of such a thing spurred him on to renewed action. During the day he had not heard a sound in the house, and he suspected that whoever was supposed to take care of him was absent; certainly, no food had been brought him.

The table which he had used as a footstool a part of the time brought him up high enough so that he could get a fair hold above. He now essayed to raise himself, and, after considerable struggling, succeeded in gaining position above.

After that it was only a moment's work to drop to the passage.

He was then in total darkness, but he felt his way to the ladder and mounted its rungs. He soon reached the trap-door, and was delighted to find that it was secured with a simple hook.

Unclassing the latter he raised on the door, and with a rattling of the attached chain, he pushed the obstacle upward.

After this was done, he easily reached the roof.

He was then far less of a prisoner than before, but immediate flight was out of the question. He was on a high building, and investigation showed that there was no fire-escape, or other means of descent.

People were passing in the street, and in an emergency he might call for help, but experience with tricks and traps led him to fear that, if he did this, his enemies would turn the tables upon him and make him out a burglar.

Every instinct told him to fight his own way, if possible.

"An' it's ter the other trap-doors I'll look," he decided. "It's hot weather, an' some on 'em may be open ter let in air. Ef I kin find sech an instance, I'll go down an' try ter convince folks that I ain't no meanly thief; while ef I can't find one open, I must go ter the end o' the block an' then sing out fur help."

He walked to the next house and tried the trap-door. It was fastened. A second and a third proved equally obstinate, but at the next house he had better luck. The door was open, and, though all was darkness below, he promptly descended the ladder.

Reaching the floor, he felt his way along a narrow passage.

He thought that he was using due care, but the result proved that such was not the fact.

Suddenly footing failed him; he pitched forward, hit against a railing, tried in vain to check his fall by grasping it, and then went bumping down a flight of stairs.

All this was alarming and painful, but he was fortunate enough to escape serious injury, and when he finally came to a stop he was not much the worse for his experience.

He had hardly regained his feet, however, when a door at one side was flung open, and out into the hall rushed a man and a woman. Both were emaciated and ragged, and looked as though they had not a dollar in the world, but the ruling idea was strong in their minds.

"Thieves!" cried the woman, in a shrill soprano.

"Robbers!" exclaimed the man, in a rambling base.

"We shall all be killed!" wailed the first speaker.

"Stand by me!" requested the man.

"Call the police! Fire! Murder!"

Kris was unable to check this flow of language, but he was laughing by that time, and the sight of half a dozen children in the room, and the terror of the old folks, convinced him that he had come among very simple-minded persons.

"Now, you hol' on!" he persuasively directed. "I ain't half so much o' a holy terror as ye think fur. I ain't no robber, but a castaway orphan!"

"Don't let him shoot you!" continued the woman, who, being of a nervous nature, was wholly deaf to reason.

Fortunately, another actor appeared on the scene in time to prevent the nervous woman from precipitating a riot. Out of the room came a lady, who at once asked a question in direct words:

"What is the trouble, my friends?"

Peace was at once established. The voice and manner of the lady had a magical effect, and Kris felt almost as though he had found one of another manner of human being. The lady was tall, slender, graceful, intelligent and refined, and her garments, though plain, had a fit and finish which gave her a very aristocratic air. Nevertheless, her voice was low and gentle, and there was a shade of sadness in her face which rendered it all the more striking.

Kris had first lost, then picked up his hat, but he now removed it politely.

"I hopes as how you'll excuse me, ma'am," he replied, "but I tumbled down-stairs."

"He don't belong in this house—" angrily began the soprano-voiced woman, but the Guide grimly interrupted:

"It hurt me jest as much ter fall down them stairs. Now, give a feller a show; I ain't no burglar, an' I kin perdooce recommends o' sobriety an' t'other things. I've been in a condemn'd scrape—ef you'll allow sech pinted language—an' was tryin' ter git out."

Both of his first acquaintances were eager to express want of belief, but the lady took charge of the affair in a quiet way of authority which did not seem at all domineering.

"I believe this lad, Mr. Weber, for he has an honest face. Enter the room again, and let us hear his story."

"Thank ye, ma'am," promptly returned the Guide, whose heart went out to the lady more and more every moment.

"I shall not be disappointed in you, shall I?"

"That you won't!"

She met his emphatic answer with a gentle smile, and they entered the room.

It was one of poverty. The floor was bare and but little furniture was to be seen. Evidence of the lack of the necessities of life was on every side, yet they were not wholly absent. On the table were several packages—one of flour, another of rice, a third of tea, a fourth of sugar, and all the others were in the same line. All, too, seemed to have just arrived.

It needed no explanation for Kris to see that the occupants of the room were very poor and that the lady was a benevolent person who had undertaken to relieve their wants.

"Now for your story," she added, when the door was closed.

Kris felt like pouring out the complete account to one so gracious and kind, but prudence did not desert him.

He began his story by stating that he was mysteriously kidnapped by persons to him unknown and for reasons even more uncertain, and then gave all the later facts; but he carefully refrained from making any mention of Union Dickinson.

He did not fail to observe that, with one exception, his hearers looked doubtful. The exception was the lady. She watched him closely, and was ready with a response when he had finished.

"Your story is not to be doubted, and I am sure our friends will no longer wish to make charge against you."

Both the woman and the man hastened to say that she was quite right; they were not rash enough to disagree with her.

"Then," she continued, "I shall be pleased to have you keep me company further. It is nearly nine o'clock; the streets here are not so safe as they might be, and my carriage is at the door."

Kris was so pleased with the lady that he did not offer any objection to the plan—though he would have preferred to go alone—and they were soon in the vehicle and moving toward the Bowery.

"I hope you don't object to keeping my company for a while?" inquired the lady, with a smile.

"Not by any means; it jest suits me."

"Your adventure has interested me in you. In fact," she added, "I never see any one in trouble without becoming interested."

She sighed as she spoke, and Kris, looking at her careworn, but still handsome face, felt certain that she had not gone thus far through life without seeing her share of trouble.

CHAPTER IX.

KRIS GIVES AN ALARM.

TIME did not hang heavily on the Pavement Guide's hands. The lady, who had introduced herself as Mrs. Ormsby, talked pleasantly, and Kris felt willing to keep her company as long as she wished.

Finally she asked him very delicately if he was poor. He confessed that he was. She then asked if he wished her to secure a situation for him.

"I am not really rich," she added, "but I have some money, and more influence. I like to help deserving boys get a start in life!"

Kris was prepared to say that if everybody was like her the world would be a good deal better kind of a world; but as for her offer, he would like to postpone action for a few days, as he had other very important work on hand.

She graciously agreed to this, and, the carriage having reached the corner of Third avenue and Fifteenth street, she inquired where he lived. Finding that she was taking him away from home, she gave him her card, gained his promise to visit her soon, and then allowed him to leave the vehicle.

As it was driven away he noticed that a robe-like article of some kind was dangling out at one side, and in danger of being lost, and he started after to give the driver warning.

The carriage turned the corner, and then, just before Kris reached that point, two men stepped from a doorway and looked after it.

"That's our game!" observed one.

"Almost too pretty ter molest," answered the second.

"Don't get sentimental!"

"Sentimental! Not I. We get our living by our wits, an' it's meself ain't goin' back on me trade. A cool fifty for the job, eh? You'll find me around ter night—an' so will she. You crack the crib, an' I foller your lead inter madam's mansion."

"Correct."

"Unless she'll pay us more ter let up."

"Come off, Tim! You can't blow two ways at once, and if you should go to deal with the Widow Ormsby, you'd find yourself in a net. Stick to our backer!"

"I'm wid ye."

The speakers returned to the doorway, but Mrs. Ormsby's carriage went on unhalted by Kris Chatterbox. He had forgotten the dangling robe in the pressure of more important matters. First of all his steps had been checked at sight of the man called "Tim."

In that person he had recognized the fellow who had kidnapped him on Stanton street, and, while he stood in surprise, his acute hearing had taken in all that the two men said.

He was wise enough to see the trouble which might follow if Tim saw him, and, before the men turned, he had dodged into a second doorway. The men paused only for a moment; then, turning, they walked away down the avenue.

"Wal," murmured Kris, "here's a hornet's nest as sure's I'm alive. The pestiferous critters ain't satisfied with goin' fur me, but must be in t'other villainy. Wonder ef they seen me? But o' course they didn't; they wouldn't la' been so oblivious o' me arterwards. Now, then, what new scheme hev they in mind?"

It was not easy to answer this question. Their conversation had revealed merely the fact that they intended to break into Mrs. Ormsby's house for some lawless purpose, and that some person, casually mentioned as their "backer," was to give them fifty dollars for the job.

What the purpose of the contemplated work was had not been made clear.

"There ain't but one thing fur me ter do," the Guide decided, "I must see Mrs. Ormsby, right off, an' let her know o' the danger!"

He started for the lady's house, and had soon reached the door and rung the bell. She answered the summons herself, with her outdoor garments still on. Her face expressed surprise when she saw Kris.

"Scuse me, ma'm," he began, "but kim I see ye privately?"

"Certainly," she returned. "Come into the parlor."

The Guide obeyed.

"Mrs. Ormsby, you're goin' ter be raided ter-night," he then added.

"Raided!"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Some measly scamps are goin' ter break inter yer house, an' what else they're goin' ter do I don't know; but it ain't no good."

Mrs. Ormsby looked puzzled.

"Explain!" she directed.

Kris obeyed, and told the story in brief, clear terms. He noticed that the lady changed color as he progressed.

"Whether they're mere robbers I can't say," he concluded, "but the fact that they spoke of a 'backer' makes me suspect thar's more'n robbery to it."

"Robbery is not the motive!"

"No?"

"No—at least, I think. I have lived in fear of this for years!"

Mrs. Ormsby clasped and unclasped her slender white hands nervously, and the boy answered quickly:

"Don't be skeered, ma'm; you've got due warnin' o' the game, an' we kin beat 'em off."

"It isn't so much the fact that two ruffians are coming here, as that my enemy is again active."

"So you've got an enemy?"

"A cruel, remorseless enemy."

"By jinks! let me help ye fight him!" cried Kris, his admiration for Mrs. Ormsby making him full of zeal. "I'll stan' by ye, an' I may do a heap o' good ef I be small."

"It seems that I have gained a true friend in you."

"You bet!—ef you'll excuse the 'spression. Jest give me leave, an' I'll help ye beat yer enemy."

"Are you willing to remain here to-night?"

The Guide thought of George Stoughton, and remembered that he had done nothing to aid that youth since morning, but he did not hesitate with his reply.

"I shall be right glad ter."

"Then I accept your offer, for, for certain reasons, I am reluctant to call in outside aid. I think you and I, with the servants, can defend the house. Besides the driver, whom you have seen, I have a strong woman who is housekeeper. We ought to be able to beat off the enemy."

"Yes; ef you think that the best way."

"Don't you?"

"My idee would be ter hev the scamps arrested."

"If they were mere house-breakers and thieves I should be of the same mind, but I feel sure that they are not. They mentioned a 'backer' who was to give them fifty dollars for their work. Now, I keep little or no money here, and you can see that the house is furnished very plainly. Obviously, gain in dollars and cents is not their object; the fifty dollars would be too much pay. No; I see in this a fresh blow from an enemy I have cause to fear!"

The speaker's nervousness increased, and Kris began to feel very curious as to the trouble to which she so indefinitely alluded, but he would not ask her for any confidence she was not inclined to give.

He respected her secret, and let it rest at that.

Mrs. Ormsby suddenly aroused.

"We are losing valuable time," she added.

"We want to make our preparations while the evening is yet with us. If we show too much light at a later hour, and the would-be house-breakers are watching, they may become suspicious."

"That's logic."

"Follow me, and we will see the servants."

They descended to the basement. The driver had just entered, and was in conversation with the housekeeper. Kris had been inclined to think their force a weak one, but sight of the housekeeper encouraged him.

She was as muscular as a man, and, when the situation had been made known, she showed a coolness that was very satisfactory.

Picking up a rolling-pin, she declared that if any intruder appeared she would guarantee the hospital doctors a "neat case" the next day.

The driver was equally fearless and cool.

An understanding having been reached, preparations were made for the night. It was not known where the enemy would try to enter, but it seemed that the basement door was the most likely to be tried. Acting upon this belief, the gas in the main hall, in the parlor, and at several places on the second floor, was left burning just enough to make a faint tongue of flame.

It was thought that this would not alarm the intruders, while it would enable the inmates to get a light quickly whenever desired.

As for weapons, they were not well supplied. Mrs. Ormsby surprised her servants by producing a revolver from her room, but the others had to rely upon extemporized clubs, the housekeeper holding fast to the rolling-pin.

When all was ready they went through the form of turning off the gas, and the house became dark. Whether any one was watching was unknown, for thus far they had not ventured to make any investigation.

By Mrs. Ormsby's direction they took positions on the second floor, and there settled down to await the crisis.

An hour passed—two hours—three hours.

Kris had crouched down by a window where he could look through the carefully-pointed slats of the blinds, and, at about one o'clock, his patience was rewarded. Two men who had come carelessly down the street turned suddenly into the area, and one, sliding his arm through the gate, opened it. Both stood under the stoop.

"It's them!" announced Kris, in a cautious whisper. "Brace up, feller-citizens, fur the fun is about ter begin!"

CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT INTRUDERS.

THE window had been left up a trifle at the bottom, and it was not long before Kris Chatterbox distinguished a slight clicking which proceeded from the basement door.

"They're pickin' the lock!" he announced.

Mrs. Ormsby drew a quick, broken breath.

"It must come!" she murmured.

"Yes; unless we skeer them away."

"We will not do that; I want them to enter. I want to see what they are after."

"Who shall go for the perleece?" Kris wishfully asked.

"Nobody."

"Hey! Be you still inclined that way?"

"If they are here on the errand which, I believe, brings them, it is far from my purpose to have them arrested. If they are common thieves, you may go for the police if we succeed in subduing them. On the other hand, if my suspicion is correct, all I desire is proof. Then—we will order them out!"

There was no time to argue the case though the Pavement Guide was left to wonder more than ever what was the secret in this worthy lady's life, and as to who her enemy was; but her secret was her own, and Kris was not disposed to meddle with it.

The man-servant had been at the head of the stairs, and he soon came to his mistress.

"They're inside the basement!" he announced.

"Very well," Mrs. Ormsby steadily returned; "keep silent, and let them operate."

Kris was of the impression that she had a suspicion of what the men would attempt, but, as the moment of trial drew near, he was not so sure that their little force could prevent whatever the intruders saw fit to do. If the latter were armed, the fight would certainly be unequal.

The Guide could hear Mrs. Ormsby breathing heavily, and it was evident that she was under severe mental strain, but her courage did not waver.

All of her primary theories bade fair to be verified. The robbers began the ascent of the various stairs. No halt was made on the parlor floor, and they moved toward that above.

The defenders of the house remained silent.

In the hall the robbers paused and whispered for a moment, and then moved toward Mrs. Ormsby's own room. Kris heard a whisper from that lady.

"I thought so!"

What she thought she did not explain, but she led the way to the hall.

The intruders had opened the room and closed the door behind them, but she boldly opened it a little, so that she could see and hear. The little tongue of flame caught the men's eyes, and one turned the gas up. Both glanced toward the bed.

"She ain't home, yet," remarked the man Tim.

"So much the better. Get to work at once."

"There's de desk."

"Sure! Now to open it."

He produced a curious-looking instrument from his pocket. Mrs. Ormsby had never seen anything like it, but as to its purpose she had no doubt. He inserted a slender end in the key-hole of the desk and began to twist gently.

"We git fifty fur this job, Ben?" observed Tim.

"Yes."

"Phat's the value o' the papers we're to get here?"

"Don't know."

"It may be 'way up in de thousands."

"Yes."

"Why can't we raise the stake? De old man would give anny sum rather than have them go astray, ef they're worth stealin'. It's dollars to cents there's money in de racket—why shouldn't we get cash for cash?"

"Tim, you're a glutton. Are we to demand over fifty fur robbing a lone widder woman? Shame on you! Be generous! Widders deserve our compassion. As for these papers, the old man told me they had no money value, but that they referred to a little affair of the past which he felt delicate about. He wants to rob a designing woman of her claws—Aha! there goes the bolt!"

He raised the cover of the desk.

"Now for the papers!" he added.

He raised his hand to make the first movement toward a search, but, suddenly, another voice, louder and clearer than their husky whispers, rung out in the room.

"Stop!"

The robbers wheeled.

Before them stood Mrs. Ormsby, revolver in hand, and the weapon covered the leader of the robbers in silent but ominous menace.

"You can end your work right here," she added.

The fellow tried to rally his wavering coolness.

"Who in perdition are you?" he asked, in momentary confusion.

"I am the owner of the papers you would steal."

"What papers?"

"Enough. Do not act the innocent rôle. I have heard your conversation. You can go back to your employer and tell him that the papers are not for him."

A gleam of rebellion appeared in the robber's eyes.

"Do you run this whole caboodle?" he demanded.

"I am mistress of this house."

"But not of me, by Judas! I'll have you understand—"

"STOP!"

His hand had sought his pocket and half-drawn a weapon, but her voice rung out sharply and authoritatively. Something about it compelled him unwillingly to obey.

"If you attempt resistance I will shoot you like the dog you are!" the brave woman added. "Your miserable lives are something that I do not crave, but I want you to understand that you are *beaten* in this game."

The man tried to laugh—to put on an air of bravado—but all of Mrs. Ormsby's little army were by that time visible, and he knew that he could not ride rough-shod over the opposition.

"What do you want?" he demanded, sullenly.

"I want you to go to your employer and say that his plot has failed."

"I'll go!" Ben eagerly agreed.

"Wait! Do not put on an expression as if you were hoodwinking us by means of wonderful wit; I know perfectly well what I am doing. I do not see fit to have you arrested, for which you may thank your lucky stars. Another word to your master!"

"I'll deliver it, ma'am."

"Tell him"—here her voice grew far more imperious and stern than Kris would have thought possible—"that if I know of another instance of his infamous work I will not only have him arrested, but reveal his secret to the whole world. Understand?"

"You bet; and I'll tell him."

"Then, the sooner you get out of the house the better. Go!"

"Thanks!"

Strong disapproval was expressed on the faces of all of Mrs. Ormsby's followers, but none of them spoke. The baffled house-breakers slouched toward the door, and their opponents stepped to one side to let them pass.

Kris Chatterton was by no means sure that trouble was over. He noticed a cunning gleam in Ben's eyes, and watched that fellow with cat-like vigilance.

It was well that he did so.

Mrs. Ormsby had lowered her revolver a little, and as Ben came opposite to her he made a sudden, sidewise leap and seized her wrist. The same motion turned the revolver upward, and, for a moment, it looked as though the affair was

going all his way, but he had not counted the cost fully.

Kris was on the alert, and at that critical instant he swung his club with good aim and force. It fell with a thump on Ben's head, and the latter relaxed his hold on Mrs. Ormsby's wrist and staggered back.

But another person was on the alert.

Tim had looked for something of the kind, and had sprung to his comrade's aid. His courage was good, and trouble might have followed, but the moment that he saw the Pavement Guide's face he paused, recoiled, and stood staring in blank wonder.

CHAPTER XI.

SEEKING TO SOLVE THE SECRET.

At any other time Tim's manner would have been amusing. It was full of bewilderment—almost, of fear. Previously, he had only noticed vaguely that one of the opposing party was a boy, but closer view caused him to recognize the aforesaid boy as one whom he supposed to be imprisoned in the Stanton street house.

He was startled to meet him again thus.

"Wal, old chap, how d'ye like the looks?" Kris asked, with a grim smile.

Tim, however, backed off and said nothing.

By that time Ben had recovered from his blow, and he spoke in a surly voice:

"We're downed, and we throw up the sponge. We will go now."

"Bless the Evil One, your master, that you ain't to be arrested!" cried the housekeeper.

Not a word replied the would-be robbers, but, as Tim regained his own wits, they commenced the retreat. The man-servant ventured to take Mrs. Ormsby's revolver without asking leave, and, headed by him, the defenders followed Ben and Tim to the basement door.

The latter hurried out to the street, and walked away, and then the gate and the door were firmly closed and secured. They were not left until it was certain that no house-breaker could force them again.

While this was being done Mrs. Ormsby disappeared, but when her companions went upstairs they found her in her own room, where she had put everything to rights.

Kris thought that he could detect traces of tears on her face, but she was as composed as ever.

"I want to thank you all for the way in which you have behaved," she said. "By allowing the men to enter here I proved my suspicions correct, and know that my enemy is again trying to persecute me—but forewarned is forearmed. I thank you all heartily, my friends, especially this brave lad!"

"Don't mention it," Kris replied.

"Later, I shall do more than to give you mere words. Will you remain here to-night? I shall be glad to have you."

"Thank you, ma'am; I will."

"Then you shall be accommodated."

"May I ask a question?"

"Certainly."

"You've mentioned a sartain enemy several times, but not his name. See?"

"I see, but"—here Mrs. Ormsby paused and meditated for several moments—"I must keep back the name for the present. You are kind to be interested, though."

Her manner was too gracious to make the rebuff vexatious, and Kris recognized the fact that she had a right to keep her own secrets to herself. He said no more in regard to her unknown enemy.

The man-servant volunteered to watch during the rest of the night, and the remainder of the party retired. The Pavement Guide could not answer for any one else, but he slept soundly until morning.

The breakfast-hour proved to be later than was agreeable to him, but he used patience and conformed to the ways of the house. After eating he only paused to have a short conversation with Mrs. Ormsby, who made him promise to call again, and then he went away.

His first step was to go home and let his parents know that he was all right.

There he learned that George Stoughton had not made his appearance.

Kris had no intention of going out on the baggage-express wagon again until he had made an effort to solve the mystery of the lost claimant's fate, and he next went to Lazarus Square.

Tuna Rollin greeted him joyfully.

"I was afraid something had happened to you," she explained.

"Why?"

"You said you'd call again, and I expected you before."

"I've been busy," returned young Chatterton, in a manner as matter-of-fact as though he had not been in peril more than once since they last met. "Any news?"

"No."

"Nothin' more erbout Union Dickinson?"

"I haven't even seen him."

"All quiet erround the house?"

"Yes."

Kris meditated. *Somebody* knew what had become of George Stoughton, and the signs pointed straight to Union Dickinson. Tuna was not a girl to imagine things that never occurred, and he had no doubt that she had seen just what she claimed. And if the big shadow and the small shadow she had seen on the window-shades had not been cast by Dickinson and the missing claimant, Kris was wide of the facts.

But if, after overpowering young Stoughton, Union had carried his body—living or dead—out into the back yard, what had been the object, and what had become of it?

The proof he had received, as he believed, of Union's dangerous enmity did not frighten him, and he ended his meditations by walking around to Dickinson's door and ringing the bell.

Union, himself, answered the ring, and his composed manner showed that, if guilty of the Guide's abduction, he had before learned of the escape.

"Hullo!" quoth Kris, coolly.

"How are you?" was the ungracious reply.

"Any news?"

"News of what?"

"George Stoughton."

"No."

"Queer, ain't it?"

"I don't know. I still hold to the opinion that the boy was a fraud."

"I don't."

"Of course you can hold to your own opinion."

"I should reckon! Be you quite sure, mister, that he went out o' your house in the way you said?"

"Certainly."

"No 'funny' biz?"

"What do you mean?"

"I presoom you went ter bed that night an' slept soundly, as an honest citizen should. Now, nothin' couldn't 'a' happened ter George Herkimer County, durin' the night, could there? Hey?"

"Absurd! Didn't I tell you he was around, all right, in the morning?"

"I believe yer did."

"That is sufficient. I am not interested in the boy, whom I have set down as an undoubted fraud. I have no more to say on the subject!"

With this curt dismissal he closed the door in the Guide's face, and Kris was left alone on the stoop. The latter nodded as though making a farewell bow.

"Kerrect, Union D., Esq.—you mean fight! Got right on ter yer high hoss, an' mean ter bluff it out, hey? I'll see yer later! I reckon I ain't got evidence enough ter call in the perleece, fur Union's word would go a good bit furdur than mine an' Tuna's; but I kin fight it out alone, can't I? I reckon; an', b'jinks, I'm goin' ter do it!"

He turned away and was walking mechanically back to Lazarus Square when old Jack came down the street, and they met at the entrance to the alley.

"Comin' in?" the negro asked.

"Yes; I thought I would."

"I want fur ter see you."

"Jes' so, my frien'."

There was a trace of eagerness in Jack's manner, and Kris hoped to get news of George. They went to the home of the Rollins', and the negro set down the market-basket he had carried.

"Dar's de wharwithal fur seb'ral good dishes," he observed, to Tuna; "an' I hope ter see a good stew wid plenty ob inyons and carrits in it. Ef I hev a weakness, Kris, it's fur inyons an' carrits."

"You kin hev them; I don't banker fur sech wild an' woolly fodder. W'ot was yer goin' ter tell me, Jack?"

"You was a-askin' about de Dickinsons brothers, an' dat Elzina Cook what Ralph was in love wid when he's a young man."

"Yes, yes."

"Wal, I's done heard erbout somebody who kin most likely tell ye a good bit—a Mrs. Nelson. She was a sarvint in de Cook family afore Ralph died, an' must 'a' known a good 'eal about her young mistress an' de love-affair. I hadn't heard ob Mrs. Nelson fur a good many years, but I did ter-day."

"Where does she hang out?"

"On Bleecker street."

"Good! I'm goin' ter see her."

The Guide did not see how he could spend his time any more wisely. He had no way of following up the clew to George Stoughton, and if he could get a chapter out of the events of the past it would be a great step forward.

He ascertained at what number Mrs. Nelson was to be found, and then took prompt leave of Lazarus Square and went to Bleecker street.

The designated house was easily found, and his ring brought an elderly woman to the door.

"Does Mrs. Nelson live here?" he asked.

"That's me."

"Kin I see ye, ma'am, on a bit o' business?"

She was an unsuspicious, meek-looking person, and his politeness won her heart. He was invited in, and they were soon seated in the front room.

"I'll come right ter the p'int," Kris proceeded.

"Did you ever know a man named Ralph Dickinson?"

"Yes. Or, at least, I used to see him. I wa'n't of his circle in society."

"You worked fur the Cook fam'ly, then, eh?"

Mrs. Nelson looked surprised.

"I can't imagine how you know so much about me. But you ain't got the last part right, I didn't work for the Cooks. They were too poor to hire anybody. I had a room of them, and did dressmaking there until the old folks died. After that I kept the room, hiring it from the new parties—the Cooks never owned the house—and Miss Elzina, the only one of the family left, she went away to some other place; a house on West Eleventh street, I remember. She was a shop-girl."

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know; I wish I did. I ain't heard from her in a good many years."

"Did she ever git married?"

"No."

The Guide's face fell.

"At least," added the woman, "she never had up ter the time when I seen her last."

"Ain't I heard some talk about her an' Ralph Dickinson havin' been sweet on each other?"

"Possibly you have, but it's all gammon, if you did. They were good friends, she and Ralph were; but that was all. I've heard Elzina say that she owed a debt of gratitude to Ralph, and that he was a right good man, but I know she didn't care for him."

"Perhaps they married after you lost track o' her."

"Land alive! Ralph had been dead for months, and he died unmarried!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE MAN WHO WAS TO MEET GEORGE.

Kris was a good deal discouraged by hearing this assertion from one who was said to know so much about the facts. He had set his heart upon the theory that Ralph Dickinson and Elzina Cook had married, and that George Stoughton was the offspring of that union, but the possibility now became an improbability.

"Ralph died a single man; I'll swear to that," added Mrs. Nelson.

"Was he out o' his head?"

"Don't ask me!" was the hurried reply. "There was something about his shutting himself up in the house so, and refusing to see any one—if, indeed, he *did* refuse—that I could never understand. I don't want to! Well, well, how times do change! Since then I was married to my second husband—I was a widow with one child at the time that Ralph died. Possibly you know my son, Albert Grafton?"

"Who?"

"Albert Grafton."

Kris sat silent with amazement. He did not know the man, but the name was familiar to a startling degree. Albert Grafton was the man who promised to meet George Stoughton at the Grand Central upon his arrival in New York, and, also, the man who had paid money to Stephen Matlock for taking care of George up in Herkimer county.

Despite Mrs. Nelson's positive denials—and he did not doubt her desire to tell the truth—he felt that he was getting into the inner circle of the mystery.

The old lady's gaze was fixed questioningly upon him, and, anxious to hide the fact that he was interested, he innocently returned:

"Oh! Grafton, is it? You didn't say Graham. No; I never met Mr. Grafton, to my knowledge. Does he live in New York?"

"No, but he does business here. He's a broker."

"Where's his office?"

"I don't exactly know. He sometimes changes it so as to be near his customers."

This was a peculiar reply, and it aroused the inquiry in the Guide's mind. Was there not something in the man's life which he did not let his aged mother know about?

Just at that moment the door-bell rung again. Mrs. Nelson went to answer it, and soon returned accompanied by a man of about forty years.

"This is my son, of whom I've just been telling you," she explained.

Grafton gave Kris a careless glance.

"How d'ye do, young feller?" he condescended to say, and then he sat down and swung one leg over the other. "Well, old lady," he added, "how are you, anyhow?"

Kris saw that he was mistaken for some boy of the immediate vicinity, and was glad that it was so. He had a chance to study Mr. Grafton a little. The latter was not an ill-looking man, but he had certain traits that did not impress the Guide well.

Briefly expressed, Mr. Grafton had a rakish look—a very convenient term which means a good deal.

Conversation ran upon trivial matters for awhile, and then Mrs. Nelson observed:

"Albert, this is a boy who has been inquiring about Elzina Cook."

Grafton flashed a quick glance toward Kris.

"The dickens he has!"

"Yes; he wants to learn about her. Do you know, he's heard a rumor that Elzina married Ralph Dickinson?"

Albert looked worried and angry.

"Boy, who are you?" he demanded.

"Christopher Columbus Chatterton."

Having given his ponderous name in full, Kris waited to see the result. Had Grafton heard of him? No change of countenance betrayed that he had.

"What do you care about the persons named?"

"I didn't know but what I could be useful ter them."

Kris looked his questioner boldly in the face as he spoke, determined to make the most of the matter.

"Useful! How!"

"Ef I kin find Elzina Cook, I'll tell her."

"Mother," and Grafton turned to Mrs. Nelson, "do you know where Elzina is?"

"No."

"Nor I. Very likely she's dead."

Again the Guide looked at Albert steadily.

"Did she have any children?" the boy retorted.

Grafton made an unmistakable start.

"Children!" he echoed. "Why, she was not married."

"Ef you know that, you must 'a' kept track o' her."

"I mean, she was not married when I saw her last, a dozen years, or so, ago."

"I don't s'pose you knew Roxanna Gray, who lived up in Herkimer county and married Stephen Matlock?"

"Never heard of her," was the calm reply.

"By the way, can I get you to do an errand for me, a little later?"

The speaker had changed his position so that Mrs. Nelson could not see his face, and he now winked in a very suggestive way and laid his finger on his lips.

Kris understood, and was not reluctant to meet the man half-way. He was positive that he had found the person who had agreed to see George at the Grand Central, and, though Grafton was a person open to suspicion, he did not impress the Guide as being in league with Dickinson; while it was only fair to infer that he knew a good deal more about George than the latter's young friend had yet learned.

If Kris could win the fellow's confidence, much might come of it.

It was not long before Grafton made an excuse to go outside, and the amateur detective took the hint and followed. His companion faced him on the sidewalk.

"Now, then, what do you mean?" he demanded.

"Hev you found George Stoughton yet?" Kris coolly asked.

"No, I haven't. Where is he?"

"Jest w'ot I want ter know. You didn't meet him at the Grand Central?"

"I was out of town; started to come in on a train of D., L. & W.; was delayed by an accident, and was three hours late. I see that you know the boy. Tell me all about him!"

"Dickinson denies that he's his uncle."

"What! has the boy been to see him?"

"Yes."

"He put his life in jeopardy!"

"I ain't sure but he did."

"Where is he, anyhow?"

"Disappeared in Union's house."

Grafton looked disappointed and angry.

"By Judas! if the old man has beat me out I'll never show my head in public again!" Grafton declared, viciously.

"I'm afeerd you'll hev ter take ter kiver, then."

"Tell me all about it."

The Guide was not yet sure of Grafton's position in the case, but he could see no harm in giving his companion an outline of what had occurred. Accordingly, he told of George's arrival in the city, the visit to Dickinson's house, and the claimant's disappearance. Grafton's expression betrayed deep annoyance.

"It was the most reckless thing in the world to go to the old man's," he asserted.

"Do you suppose he's really done harm ter George?"

"Perhaps; though he wouldn't be likely to if he knew—"

"Knew what?" Kris asked, as Grafton came to a sudden stop.

"Never mind."

"Is George really his nephew?"

"So runs the story," the man replied, with a laugh.

"Then he must be Ralph Dickinson's son, eh?"

"You want to know too much. Now, I'm at a loss what to do. Union has given you his little yarn; it is not a bad one on the face, and he will stick to it. I couldn't shake him by calling upon him. By the flends! if that boy is dead it's a bad go, and it falls heaviest on a third party—a woman!"

Hardly had he spoken the last words when Grafton caught Kris's arm and drew him into the cover of the area.

"By heavens!" he added, "there's the woman, herself, now!"

Kris looked and saw his new friend, Mrs. Ormsby, riding past in her carriage.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE ENEMY'S CAMP.

THE Pavement Guide was bewildered. The assertion came suddenly, and he could not see in what way Mrs. Ormsby was connected with the case of the missing claimant, or realize that she really had any connection with it.

The widow's carriage was moving quietly along the street, and as she did not turn her head, but sat like one in deep thought, they were not discovered. Albert Grafton drew a sigh of relief as the vehicle receded.

"A close call!" he commented.

"Why?" Kris asked.

"I didn't want her to recognize me."

The boy remembered the widow's mysterious foe.

"Has she reason ter hate ye?" he asked.

Grafton gave him a quick glance and became more reserved.

"Not an atom," he answered, "but we can't always fly up on the house-tops, clap our wings and draw the attention of Tom, Dick and Harry by a vociferous crowing."

"But what's she got ter do with George Stoughton?"

"Nothing."

"You said the blow would fall heaviest on her ef he's dead."

"You misunderstood me. I only meant that if he had been killed by Dickinson, and Union got into trouble, it would be a blow to her."

"What is Union ter her?"

"See here!" cried Grafton, annoyed by this persistent questioning, "are you all tongue, or not? What right have you to suppose I'm going to tell all I know?"

"Gently, my frien': I ain't tried ter pump ye at all; but it strikes me that I am an important factor in George Herkimer County's case."

"You're right," was the more moderate response. "Excuse me for running off on a high horse. All I wish to convey is that there are certain things which I do not feel justified in making public at this stage of affairs. On the other hand, I recognize in you a boy of unusual shrewdness, and I shall be glad to take you as a partner and have your help right along."

The speaker's manner betrayed a desire to win the Guide's good-will, and Kris was shrewd enough to suspect that fear entered into the motives.

If Grafton could bind the boy to him, it would cut off any side issues which might lead to somebody else winning all the laurels, to Grafton's sorrow and defeat.

Clearly as Kris realized this trick, he did not

reveal the fact that he had detected it. The case was not promising enough so that he could afford to be too independent; he determined to keep in Grafton's favor for a while longer.

The latter appeared to be uncertain what to do, and asked Kris to walk with him down the street. This the Guide did. Grafton went slowly, and acted like one in deep thought.

"This disappearance of young Stoughton is not only alarming, but puzzling," he finally remarked. "Without him at hand I don't know what to do."

"Can't ye find him?"

"Where shall I look?"

"Union Dickinson kin tell you."

"He can, but will he?"

"Likely not, especially ef he's killed the boy."

"Second thought convinces me that the boy is alive. Union is a rascal, but that he would be guilty of deliberate murder does not seem likely—though he treated his own brother badly enough. Egad! I believe I'll go and see Union!"

"That ain't a bad scheme."

"I'll do it. You come with me, for I shall want a witness."

This was said in a half-hearted way, which satisfied Kris that his companion would gladly have sent him adrift if he dared, but, plainly, the man was afraid the Guide might work him injury if he allowed him to go.

Kris was not reluctant, and they went to Dickinson's at once.

Peter May, the one-legged servant, opened the door. Grafton civilly explained that he wanted to see the master of the house, but Peter's gaze was upon Kris, and he curtly declared that his master would see no one that day. Grafton was prepared for such a reception, and he forcibly entered, shoving Peter aside.

"Tell old Dick," he airily directed, "that we are waiting for him in the parlor."

And then he marched into the room with a show of confidence that dumfounded Peter. The latter looked as though he would like to throw the bold intruder out, but his missing leg was a barrier to athletic efforts.

Instead, he went for Dickinson.

The old man soon appeared, and he came with his face figuratively black with anger. His eyes darted a glance around, and there were signs of a storm when he saw Kris, but Grafton changed the whole current of events by rising and confronting the new-comer.

"How d'ye do, Union?" he coolly saluted.

Dickinson's gaze turned upon the speaker—he hesitated—and then his color changed.

"You here!" he exclaimed.

"Even so."

"Have you come with him?" and Dickinson pointed to Kris.

"I have."

"Then I order you out of the house!" was the hot retort.

"Softly, Union! Be sure you're right before you go ahead."

"You don't come here as my friend."

"Right! I don't."

"Then you suppose I will tolerate—"

"Prudence is often the parent of action. You know me well enough to be sure that I will not give way an inch to you or any other man."

"I always suspected you of being my enemy in the past, and I know it now!" bitterly declared Union.

"Enmity is a word that covers a good deal of ground. I may be opposed to you, and yet have no desire to do you injury."

Kris thought that Albert gave their host a meaning glance, but the latter, frowning on vacancy, only sat down and sullenly asked:

"What do you want?"

"I want George Stoughton!"

"Have you been led here by that boy's lies?" and Union pointed to Kris in fresh anger. "I tell you I have no knowledge of Stoughton. If he is a ward of yours you had better take care of him. He left this house precisely as I have stated he did, going with a stranger, and without a word of explanation to me. Who is that boy? I never heard of him before."

"Did he claim to be your nephew?"

Union looked at Kris nervously, and sullenly replied:

"He made that claim."

"He couldn't be your nephew without being the son of your late brother, Ralph."

Dickinson brought his hand furiously down upon the table.

"My brother was never married!" he cried.

"How about Elzina Cook?"

"He never even cared for her," asserted Union, looking very much alarmed. "There

were circumstances which made it utterly impossible for them to marry."

"What circumstances?"

"You must learn for yourself; I shall not tell."

A peculiar smile crossed Albert's face.

"Then whose son is George?"

"Why do you harp upon that subject? According to the youngster's own account it was Albert Grafton, who induced him to come."

"n' you vowed you'd never even heard of Albert Grafton," interrupted Kris.

"Silence! If I did deny the fact, it was because I had no desire to help along an infamous cause. What was Stoughton to me, anyhow? A creature put forward by designing men to work ruin. Yes; I denied the acquaintance, and very properly, too!"

He continued angry and violent, but Grafton did not lose his calmness.

"Union," he returned, "you and I have never met in the last twelve years, and it's possible that you thought me dead; but I've had an eye on you, and have bided my time."

"So you confess that you're in the plot."

"There is no plot. If you had received Stoughton as you ought, the matter would have been settled in short order. Now, I call upon you to account for the boy."

Dickinson seemed almost beside himself with rage.

"I tell you I have no knowledge of the boy."

"He was made way with in this house."

"It is false as perdition!"

"Whether you killed him or not I don't know, but it is certain that you got him out of sight. If he is alive, your best way is to tell where he is. Should you persist in your denial it will be taken as evidence that you've slain the boy."

"And then?" questioned Dickinson, harshly.

"I shall notify the police!"

"Enough!" was the determined reply. "If I have got to fight you, fight it shall be. I am a persecuted man, but my knowledge of you shows how useless remonstrances would be. I know you, and so do the police, as a life-long blackleg and swindler. I'll show you how I deal with such men!"

He brought his foot down heavily on the floor. It was evidently a signal, for the door opened and two men entered. Kris Chatterbox felt a thrill of uneasiness as he recognized Ben and Tim, the two ruffians of whom he had previous unpleasant knowledge.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME ONE ELSE IS PUZZLED.

It was the evening following the events last described.

Tuna Rollin was homeward bound with articles purchased at a grocery store. There were several packages, the whole being neatly arranged in a basket.

As she passed a corner and essayed to cross a side-street, she suddenly found herself directly in front of a rapidly-driven horse. She tried to avoid it, but was so signally unsuccessful that a shaft caught her arm, and in a moment more she was flung down on the crossing.

Luckily, she rolled clear of the horse, and, less injured than frightened, she hurriedly regained her feet.

The horse had been checked and was standing still, so the danger was over, but the contents of the basket were scattered widely, and at least two of the packages had broken and allowed their contents to mix with the mud of the street.

Tuna gazed with dismay, but, while she did so, a lady emerged from the carriage.

"Oh, James! see what you have done!" she cried.

"I'm mighty sorry," returned the driver, humbly, "but I didn't hev time to stop."

The lady turned to Tuna.

"Are you hurt, child?" she asked, anxiously.

"No."

It was a faint, mechanical reply, and Tuna still looked at the scattered articles. The lady understood what that meant. For years she had given to the poor all that her means would allow, and the stamp of poverty was well known to her. She realized what such a loss was to the poorly-clad girl, and she quickly continued:

"I will make your loss good. Do you live far from here?"

The alley was but a short distance away, and Tuna pointed to it.

"In Lazarus Square," she returned.

"Here is a grocery store; I will replace all of your articles, and see that they get home in safety."

Tuna's face brightened, and she did not object to the plan. The purchases were made, and when the servant had been directed to drive to the alley and wait, the lady accompanied Tuna as she had promised, anxious to undo the damage as far as possible.

This good genius was Mrs. Ormsby, and it was only in keeping with her usual methods that she was taking an interest in the ragged girl.

That she had found a real case of poverty became clear when they entered Lazarus Square, and the tumble-down, poorly-furnished but neat home of the Rollins emphasized the fact.

Mrs. Rollin had not returned, and old Jack was away, so Tuna had to do all the honors of the house. This she did with quaint, old-fashioned grace which charmed Mrs. Ormsby. Delicately putting several questions, she soon gained an idea of the hard struggle the family had to live.

"Everybody's poor in Lazarus Square," Tuna remarked, "but our neighbors on the street ain't. Mr. Union Dickinson owns that house there, and he must be rich."

Mrs. Ormsby started.

"Who owns it?"

"Mr. Union Dickinson."

"Does he live there?"

"Yes, ma'am."

Mrs. Ormsby looked out of the window, and her changing color betrayed agitation.

"I did not know—I did not suspect we were near where he lived. What street is that! But why should I ask? There can be but one person of the name. I did not know we were near this street."

All this was thoughtfully said, while Tuna looked at the lady curiously.

"Do you know him, ma'am?" she asked.

"I did once."

"Is he a good man?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I don't think he is—and Kris Chatterbox don't think so, either."

"So you know Kris?"

"Oh! yes; he's one of our best friends."

"I hope he isn't a friend of Union Dickinson's?"

"Indeed, he is not. He and I both think Mr. Dickinson is a dangerous man. There is a boy who has disappeared there strangely, and Kris is trying to find out all about him. I've been talking with Jack—he's our colored helper and friend—and we think the boy was his brother's son."

"I don't understand. Whose son?"

"Mr. Ralph Dickinson's. You see," pursued Tuna, seriously, and telling the story according as she saw it, if not correctly, "Mr. Ralph once loved a girl named Elzina Cook—"

"He did?"

There was surprise and wonder in Mrs. Ormsby's voice and manner, but Tuna did not observe it.

"I don't know what kind of a girl Elzina was, but Ralph was a nice young man—very different from his brother. Well, there isn't any proof of it, but I am sure that they were married."

"Go on!"

"Ralph died, and that, of course, left Elzina a widow. Now, I think the lost boy was their son."

"Who was this boy?"

"He was known as George Stoughton, and came from Herkimer county."

"How was he lost?"

"He went to Union Dickinson's house, and claimed him as his uncle, and then disappeared. We can't prove it, but we think his uncle put him out of the way."

The girl was reluctant to speak of the tell-tale shadows on the curtain, and the scene in the yard, and even when Mrs. Ormsby, noticeably interested, asked for a more detailed account of the affair, Tuna kept that part back and let the rest indicate what it would.

Mrs. Ormsby looked puzzled, but not alarmed.

"I think the youth from Herkimer county has been deceived by some one," she remarked.

"Jes' my idee, but dey hev sorter shook me in my belief sence," said a new voice, and old Jack entered.

He bowed low to the visitor and added:

"Scuse me fur introodin', but de 'taters must be sot a-b'ilin'."

"Don't apologize, I beg of you."

"Jack knew Elzina Cook, once," observed Tuna.

"Indeed! is that so?"

"Knowned her by sight, though I s'peck she nebah noticed me."

"Where is she now?"

"Doan' know."

"Would you recognize her, if you saw her?"

"Sertain."

"Do you think she married Ralph Dickinson?"

"I declar', I dunno w'ot I do think. My mind whiffles like a weather-vane. Ef anybody sets out ter argue onter me, I kin b'lieve either way in less dan f'ree minutes!"

"And who is George Stoughton?"

"He's either Ralph's son or he ain't—'clare ter gracious, I ain't clear w'ich."

"Perhaps, I can help you a little in arriving at a conclusion."

"Deed! Kin you?"

"Ralph Dickinson died unmarried!"

"You don't say so."

"It is true. I knew him well, and a more worthy, honorable, sympathetic man never lived—indeed, these qualities cost him his life."

"Mum, you amaze me."

"Few persons know much about Ralph, or ever did. He was a quiet, silent man, but his heart beat with no uncertain pulsations; honor and kindness were his own. Poor Ralph! If the world was to see the veil torn away from his tragic fate it would be startled—but what am I saying? Too much has been said already."

She arose abruptly.

"Shall you see Kris Chatterton soon?" she asked, in a practical way, unlike her recent meditative utterance.

"I think so, ma'am," Tuna responded.

"Say to him that I should like to see him at once. I may call upon him before he is around here, but, if I fail to find him, urge my request upon him. I want to see the lad."

"We will tell him."

Mrs. Ormsby seemed to feel uncomfortable, and to be in a hurry to depart. She pressed a ten-dollar bill into Tuna's hand, despite the latter's mechanical half-protest in pantomime, and then hurried out of the house.

She looked at the walls of Dickinson's house as though half-afraid to pass through the alley, and the celerity of her movements was an indication that she was eager to get away.

She gave the brief direction, "Home!" to the driver, and then entered the carriage and sunk back on the seat. She only waited to make sure that the house of ill-omen was left behind, and then pressed her hands over her forehead. Every nerve there seemed to be quivering.

"What does it mean?" she murmured. "At the very moment of Union Dickinson's fresh attempt to rob me of my papers a boy appears at his house and claims to be his nephew—or, rather, the attempt at robbery follows the appearance of the claimant. Strange! What does it mean?"

She struggled with the puzzle in vain.

"Union saw danger in the appearance of the boy; but why? What connection could he have with the matter! He surely could not be Union's nephew. Then why should he be feared? There is a mystery here which I cannot solve. Where am I to look for light on the subject?"

CHAPTER XV.

A MESSAGE BY THE AIR-LINE.

"She's a good woman!"

This was Tuna's comment when Mrs. Ormsby had gone, and old Jack heartily replied:

"Dat ar' is de correck prognosticatum ob de facts."

"She seemed to be very much interested in the Dickinsons."

"Yes, sah; I noticed dat, myself."

"Kris will have to give up the idea that George was Ralph's son."

"Looks amazin'ly like it, though I wouldn't bet any genuine money on it. Mrs. Ormsby is as likely ter be mistaken as anybody else."

"Isn't there some way to find Elzina Cook?"

"Dunno whar we should look."

"It is only twelve or thirteen years since folks knew of her."

"Dat's a right long time, an' folks kin disappear se'ral times in de period. Lemme see—did Mrs. Ormsby say she ever knowed Elzina?"

"I don't think she said, one way or the other."

"Dat's my recollecksum. She said she knowed Ralph once, though. Wal, it ain't likely she kin tell whar Elzina is—course not, or she would 'a' mentioned de sarcumstance. Wish Elzina could be found, by gracious, fur it would simplify de considerations. Dem 'taters is all b'iled, an' yer mammer ought to arrive."

The coming of Mrs. Rollin at this moment freed Jack's mind of one trouble, and showed that the potatoes would not spoil. The little family was soon engaged in eating the frugal supper. Mrs. Rollin, however, did not remain home long. There was sickness in the family where she had been working during the day, and she had been offered a desirable sum to act as nurse during the night. Having accepted this offer, she soon left Lazarus Square again.

An hour passed. Old Jack sat dozing in the corner, his white head bobbing up and down eccentrically. Tuna felt lonesome, and went out into the so-called square.

There was little to be seen there. The other residents were all in-doors, and only the walls of the front houses met Tuna's view. They were about as monotonous as a desert of sand.

Union Dickinson's house was more than monotonous; it was grim, forbidding and suggestive. What secrets its walls held the girl had no means of knowing, but she was glad that she did not live there.

She was looking up at the building when something shot past her head, struck the wall of her own home with a sharp sound, and fell to the ground. She could not see what it was, or whence it had come, but it was not unlike a pebble, she thought—possibly a little lighter as to weight.

Believing that some one was making a target of her, for an unknown purpose, she stood still. There was only a brief pause, and then a second missile struck almost as the first had done.

That time she made two discoveries: it had come from the direction of Union Dickinson's house, and from a considerable height.

Considerably puzzled, she scanned the top windows, but the darkness prevented any discovery that might otherwise have been made. A third time, however, a small object passed her and struck her own house.

All this must have some meaning, and she turned to see what the missiles had been. She found the remains of what had lately been lumps of wall-paper, evidently torn from laths, for it had considerable shape left when not crushed.

Some one in the upper part of Dickinson's house was thus making her a target. Who? With what object?

She overcame her fear and walked to the high board fence, on the other side of which she had seen the unknown man disappear with his strange burden on the night of the window-shade shadow pantomime.

Then she met with a fresh surprise. Something began to scrape the fence slightly, and she saw a small white object moving up and down in an eccentric fashion.

She had grown nervous, but natural courage held her to the spot. She reached out and caught the dancing thing of white.

Wonder of wonders!—it was a slip of paper fastened to a string, and weighted down with a large lump of the plaster; and the further end of the string led away toward the upper part of Union Dickinson's house!

Tuna's cheeks flushed and her breath came quickly. She saw great possibilities in this affair.

"What if the Stoughton boy is up there?" she whispered.

Easily recognizing the fact that the slip of paper might be a note, she tore it loose and hurried into her own house with it. She had only to hold it to the light to see that there was writing upon it, and then she uttered a little scream.

"Why, it's from Kris!" she cried.

Sure enough, the Pavement Guide's name was signed to it. The communication was a rough one. It was written in pencil, and in such erratic style that it was hard to read. Tuna, however, made it out a little at a time, and this is what she read:

"Know all men by these presents, that I want to get out. Being a youthful citizen of New York, and having all my debts paid, I'm entitled to liberty—but I ain't got it. I'm held here in captivity, bondage, slavery and quod, shut in by a mean skunk; and he is Union Dickinson. Get me out, somebody, or I shall soon be a white-robed spook."

"C. C. CHATTERTON."

Queerly as it was expressed, Tuna had no difficulty in understanding, and she ran to the sleeping negro and aroused him.

"Oh! Jack, Jack!" she cried, "Kris is a prisoner!"

"Hey? What, what? Where's de fiah?" Jack demanded, in confusion.

"Union Dickinson has got Kris a prisoner, but he's written a note and thrown it out with a weight and string, and now we must get him out. See?"

Jack saw that she was very much excited, and that was about all he *did* see. The rest was as bad as Greek to him, and he had to ask for an explanation. It was given; he saw the matter as Tuna did; and then, with one voice, they declared that Kris must be rescued.

But how?

How could they accomplish it?

The police were mentioned, but neither had faith in that source of relief. They felt that they must rely upon their own efforts, but could not see their way clear.

Investigation showed that the string led to a third story window. They pulled the string, and were answered by a similar signal at the other end. They thought, too, that they saw something white waved inside the room, but that was not certain.

Nothing was to be seen at the window, properly speaking, and this led Jack to suspect that the window was barred.

"Dunno how we kin get at 'um," Jack admitted, shaking his head gravely.

"We must, somehow."

"How kin it be done?"

"Kris is in there, and we must get him out!" Tuna declared, with emphasis.

"Ye-es, but how—"

Jack paused, shook his head, and, overcome by the magnitude of the question, relapsed into silence.

Tuna was equally at fault, but more determined. How it happened that Kris was in the house at all she did not see, for it was in a locality which, he well knew, was pregnant with danger, but there he was, and he must be liberated.

But how? It was an ugly question. Tuna had a vague idea that if she were a boy she could make use of the window-sills and blinds, and climb to her friend, but, being a girl, she very wisely decided that this scheme was not practicable.

Considerable time was consumed in discussing the matter. Both she and Jack looked for some way which would be strategic, but they were obliged to fall back on the belief that the only way was to enter the house in an ordinary manner.

"An' dat's out ob de quess'on," commented Jack.

"No, it ain't; I'm going in!" the girl declared.

"How?"

"The house isn't fastened; I'm going to slip in by the back door, and then go up to Kris."

"But think ob de danger—"

"It makes no difference. Kris is my friend, and I ain't going to see him suffer. I'm going in, and going at once!"

And the brave girl started for the door.

CHAPTER XVI.

HIS BRAVE YOUNG FRIEND.

OLD Jack was in a panic, and he proceeded to argue with all the eloquence at his command, but he talked in vain. Tuna Rollin had decided to enter Union Dickinson's house, and she went about her preparations with calm determination.

A barrel was set up against the high fence which separated Lazarus Square from Dickinson's yard, and, with the aid of that and Jack's arms, Tuna gained the top and then dropped over the other side.

Once there her own boldness startled her, and her heart beat rapidly, but she rallied and started for the basement door.

As she had expected, that door proved to be unfastened, and she opened it and entered. The gas was burning in the hall, but only just enough to break the darkness. No one appeared to be near.

She did not pause there, but ascended the stairs with steps that were almost noiseless. On the parlor floor the gas burned brightly, but careful reconnoitering convinced her that no one was situated so as to observe her, and she saw with relief that all was dim above.

She started up the next flight of stairs.

The way seemed strangely open and unprotected, but when she reached the floor where she supposed Kris to be, she encountered an unsurmountable barrier. In one room the gas was burning, and two men sat there playing cards. Really, they were Union Dickinson's tools, Ben and Tim, but, as she did not know them, she saw only two very disreputable looking fellows.

But this was not the worst of it.

The moment that Tuna saw the room she knew that it was a barrier to her progress. Looking toward the further end she saw another door, with the key in the lock. Plainly, it was the way to Kris Chatterton's prison, and the

fact that the men were so near explained why the boy had relied wholly upon signals, and not to ventured to call.

Tuna stood in silent dismay.

What was she to do?

She had a horror of drunken men at any time, and it was clear that these particular men were dangerous in the extreme. She lighted a candle close to the wall, where they would not see her, and stood in silence while she studied the situation.

The voices of the men sounded in contention.

"Yes," Ben was saying, in drunken confidence, "Dickinson is a fine fellow; as fit they make them."

"He has paid us well so far."

"He has, that."

"But the question is, shall we get de extra would has promised us when his enemies are all round ed up?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Because we are takin' some risk, ye know."

"Oh, it'll all come out right. Union ain't going to make any slip this time, and the Chatterton kid won't be running around again."

"I don't see what's de matter, anyhow, which Dickinson is so scared—that is, ef he tells dat truth in saying dat Stoughton ain't hisly, nephew."

"Ah! but he is really afraid he is his nephew."

"Suppose he is. You say that Union holds his money by such rights that no one could take it away from him. So phat does he care whether the kid is his nephew or not?"

"Tim, can you keep a secret?"

"I kin, that."

"Well, the trouble is right here: Money don't figure in it, but fear does. Once Union had a brother, Ralph. They quarreled—what about, I don't know—and Union drew a revolver on Ralph. The latter grabbed it; they had a struggle; the revolver went off, and Ralph was shot."

"Dead?"

"He might as well have been. He took to his bed, laid there some weeks with only poor medical attendance, and then died. He acted right square by Union. They had quarreled, and Ralph thought Union was doing mean by a certain party, but the younger brother wouldn't have it known that he was shot. Rather than have his brother tried for manslaughter he bore his wound as I said, and nobody knew why he had so suddenly become a 'hermit,' as was given out."

"More fool, he!" declared Tim.

"The result proved it so. When he saw he was going to die he gave Union choice between being arrested and making a certain promise. Naturally, Union gave the promise. Ralph made him swear on a Bible—then Ralph died."

"What did the promise amount ter?"

"Nothing, with Union. Once Ralph was dead the danger was over, and that was the last of it."

"What was dat promise?"

"I don't know, but it referred to a girl named Elzina Cook."

"Ef that promise was so badly kept, kin we trust Union, now?"

"Don't have a fear; he hadn't dare betray us. He'll pay."

"Bet yer life, or I'll make it lively for de feller."

"Tim, heave away the cards and let us brace. We've got so much liquor down we are half-lifeless, and if the prisoners are to be carted away we want clear heads and strong legs."

Acting on this theory, the men arose and began to move around the room. Tuna stood in uncertainty; did she have any hope of success by remaining there? She had overheard something of importance, but that did not help her to get Kris out of his prison.

The ringing of the door-bell startled her, and moved the two men into action.

"The fellows have come!" exclaimed Ben.

"Let's go down."

They started, and Tuna only had sufficient time to retreat to the darkest corner of the hall. She was in a panic for fear they would discover her, but their eyesight was dimmed by whisky.

Both started down the stairs, while the girl gazed with breathless interest, scarcely able to credit her good fortune. As soon as they were out of sight, she ran into the room they had just vacated, passed on to the closed door and turned the key.

Flung the door open she looked eagerly, and Kris promptly appeared.

"Great Caesar! you here?" he exclaimed.

"Oh! Kris, Kris! come out quick; they'll be back in a moment!"

Tuna was so excited she could hardly find words, but the truth flashed upon Kris.

"You're a hero, by jingo!" he cried. "Talk about yer great women of old times! Why, you beat them—"

Don't stop to talk! They'll come back."

Whar be they?"

Gone down-stairs to let in some of the gang. How are we going to get out past them?"

"I've it! We'll go part o' the way down, an' when they come back up we'll dodge 'em on the idle floor. We must! I've had quite a taste of captivity, an' I tell ye I've got my fill on't. Come on!"

Hand in hand they ran lightly down the first stairs. Then they could see Ben and Tim on the parlor floor, with Union Dickinson by their side. He had on his street garments, and it was evidently he who had rung the bell.

The young people paused and listened.

"We will bring down the boy, first," observed Dickinson. "There will be less difficulty about it, and we want to hustle away as soon as we get the man into the carriage."

Kris touched Tuna's arm.

"Just the figure!" he whispered. "Come in here!"

A door near them was ajar, and they entered and found themselves in darkness. The three men ascended the stairs. For the time danger was imminent, but the evil trio went to the floor above.

Then Kris and Tuna ran down the remaining two flights and were in the basement. The girl would have hastened out, but Kit paused.

"Albert Grafton is locked up hyar. We want him! We must hev him!"

Turning the gas higher, he located the kitchen door. He tried to open it—it was fast. He saw an ax near at hand, and did not hesitate to use it. Swinging it aloft he dealt three heavy blows in succession, and the door flew open. He peered inside.

"Be you there?" he asked.

Grafton appeared.

"Out o' this in quick order!" the Guide commanded. "Don't stop to talk. Come!"

Loud voices sounded in the upper part of the house, and Grafton was shrewd enough to comprehend the critical state of affairs and act prudently. All three hurried into the yard, and Kris locked the door behind them. Then Grafton helped Tuna over the fence into Lazarus Square, and he and Kris scrambled after.

"They'll follow us!" cried the girl, in alarm.

"Not much, they won't!" declared Grafton. "I've had enough of this, and, though it may end in my being sent 'up,' too, I'll have them arrested!"

At that moment he saw the blue uniform of a policeman at the entrance to the alley. He hurried to the street, and saw a patrolman and a roundsman.

He began a hurried explanation, and called upon the officers to make the arrest, but he was still talking when Tuna, who had remained in Lazarus Square, ran out.

"They're escaping by the rear!" she exclaimed.

The officers had heard enough to become interested, and they followed willingly when Grafton and Kris hastened back. They were just in time to see the last of the trio go over the fence into the yard exactly back of that belonging to Dickinson's house.

"After them!" cried Kris; "they can't get out!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET MADE PLAIN.

THE chase became exciting. No one could see clearly why the fugitives should take their course, for there was no alley there, and it seemed that they must be hemmed in by the limits of the block, but all except Tuna followed.

Some light was obtained when the fugitives, led by Dickinson, rushed into the basement of the other house. The pursuers, who were almost on their heels, followed, and when Dickinson tried to close the door in their faces, the officers flung themselves against it with a force which dashed the leading villain to the floor.

He did not rise, but lay senseless.

Ben and Tim, finding themselves menaced by the revolvers of the officers, promptly begged for mercy.

Down the stairs came a gray-haired stranger. He changed color when he saw the scene, hesitated, and then came forward quickly.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I see that Dickinson has come to grief, and I am not sorry. But I

have a confession to make; I have been his accomplice in a crime. He held a mortgage on my property, and, by means of threats, he forced me to harbor and act as jailer of a boy against whom he had some grudge. I want to deliver that boy to you now, and wash my hands of the whole affair."

Kris turned a triumphant glance upon Grafton.

"I'll bet a million that George Stoughton is found!" he exclaimed.

"That is the boy's name," added the master of the house. "Dickinson awakened me late one night by ringing my door-bell, and, when he had forced me into agreeing to take the lad in as a prisoner, he brought him over the fence from his yard to mine."

What Tuna had seen the night in question was no longer a mystery.

"Lead the way ter the aforesaid George," Kris requested.

"I'll bring him."

The officers did not hesitate to put Dickinson, Ben and Tim under arrest, and, by the time they had settled this matter, the owner of the house returned with the once missing claimant in charge. George was pale, but otherwise looked none the worse for his experience, and his joy was unbounded at seeing Kris again.

Dickinson recovered his senses, but, finding how matters were situated, refused to make any conversation.

Kris had told George who Grafton was, and the latter, after some meditation, sullenly said:

"Boy, if you want the mystery of your life cleared up, you and Kris shall come with me. I'll order a carriage, and, in half an hour, all will be plain."

George seized the chance eagerly, and Kris did not object. After seeing the prisoners started for the station-house, the trio entered a vehicle and set off on their journey. Kris did not hear the order given the driver, but when they finally came to a halt he had a surprise.

They were at the door [of Mrs. Ormsby's house].

A light still burned inside, and Grafton gave the bell a quick, nervous ring which brought the female servant in haste.

"Say to your mistress," Grafton directed, "that we want to see her on most important business."

Mrs. Ormsby soon appeared.

The latter saw Kris first, and a smile lighted up her fine face, but she stopped short at sight of Grafton. He had remained standing, with the former appearance of nervousness. The start which she gave indicated that his mood proved infectious.

"You, here?" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Mrs. Ormsby, I am here," he rapidly answered; "but you cannot surmise what errand brought me. I am going to confess a crime and throw myself upon your mercy!"

Her gaze wandered, rested upon George, and then she changed color.

"A crime?" she repeated.

"Yes. To-night your husband, Union Dickinson, has been arrested—"

"Do not call him my husband!" Mrs. Ormsby cried.

"He was, at one time."

"Unfortunately for me, yes!"

Kris Chatterton sat amazed. Not once had he suspected that he was to hear this.

"Your past is, of course, known to me," Grafton continued, quickly. "I know that when you were young and poor you married Union Dickinson. You were then Elzina Cook, a shop-girl. You were unjustly accused of stealing money which your employer had carelessly left around. Dickinson appeared; worked hard for you; proved your innocence. You thought him a noble man, and, when he asked you to marry him, you, in your gratitude, consented."

"He gave a plausible excuse for keeping the marriage secret, and you foolishly consented. Several months passed, and he showed himself a villain. He was brutal to an extreme, and, having managed to put the proofs of the marriage out of sight, denied that you were his wife."

"His brother, Ralph, became interested, was often with you, encouraged you, and tried to get the lost proofs. He also reasoned with Union, but that cost him his life. Union drew a revolver on him, and, in the struggle that followed, it was discharged and gave Ralph a wound of which he died."

"You ceased to see Union, whom you now abhorred, but, a few months later, a child was born. It was yours and Union's."

"Now I reach my crime."

"I was but little more more than a boy, but I

had come to hate Union. I planned revenge. The proofs of the marriage were in my hands, and I determined to secure the infant and hold him over Union's head as a rod of terror. Circumstances favored me, and I stole the child and gave him in charge of a woman named Roxanna Gray. You were very ill, and, when you recovered, it was not hard to make you believe that your child had died."

"But it did not die! Still in charge of Roxanna I sent it to the country, where it was adopted by a farmer and reared. As time passed I kept postponing my contemplated revenge; to be plain, I was afraid to carry it out."

"I never took any step until, a short time ago, I learned that the protectors of the child, now a boy of fourteen years, were all dead, and that they had told him enough to make the case dangerous."

"In this dilemma I consulted a friend of mine—who need not be mentioned here, as none of you know him—and he braced up my wavering courage until I decided to send for the boy, and use him to extort money from Union Dickinson."

"The boy came, but I was prevented from meeting him at the Grand Central, as I intended, and the progress of events has rendered my plans hopeless."

"In conclusion"—here he produced a package of papers—"here are the proofs that you are Union Dickinson's lawful wife. For my crime in stealing your child, and keeping him away from you all these years, I can offer no excuse."

"My deed was one of villainy, and I can only throw myself on your mercy and—present your son to you. There he is!"

Ceasing his rapid revelation, Grafton pointed to George Stoughton.

There was a short pause. George was bewildered but eager; Kris was filled with wonder; while Mrs. Ormsby, pale and red by turns, looked at the boy from Herkimer county with a world of emotion in her face—too much to be painted on paper.

Grafton touched the Pavement Guide's arm.

"Let us go to the hall, and leave them alone for a little while," he added.

And they went out.

"If she sees fit to have me arrested," Grafton then said, pacing the floor. "I shall remain and face the music. I deserve punishment!"

"Nobody but you has known that George was that stolen kid, eh?" asked Kris.

"Nobody."

"Didn't Union know he ever had a son?"

"No. I deceived even Roxanna Gray, and she really thought Union was the uncle, not the father. As for Union's fear of George, he saw the family likeness and really *did* think the boy might have been Ralph's son; and as he was responsible for Ralph's death, he feared a son might seek revenge."

"Great Scott! I never thought Mrs. Ormsby was Elzina Cook!"

"She took the name she now bears when her own uncle, Amos Ormsby, died and left her a comfortable sum. By the way, boy, she ought to do well by you. To you, directly and indirectly, she owes the recovery of her son, for your activity in the case has rendered my plans, and Union's, futile. Yes; Mrs. Ormsby ought to feel grateful to you."

Before Kris left the house, that night, he had proof that Mrs. Ormsby *was* grateful. She fully believed that George Stoughton was her son, and when she knew how much Kris had done for him, and remembered what the Pavement Guide had done for her, she declared that one of the most sacred duties she had in the world was to reward their brave champion.

And the result?

Grafton was not forgiven, but was allowed to go without being arrested. He left New York, and was believed to have gone to Chicago. Union Dickinson dared not face his accusers, but committed suicide, only living to admit the legality of his marriage to Mrs. Ormsby. Ben and Tim were sent to prison.

Mrs. Ormsby proved generous. Having acquired the Dickinson property, she gave aid to all who had helped her. To Kris she gave a lift in business which makes his future look bright. All realized his great service to her interests.

George is the pride of his mother's heart.

The Rollin family and old Jack were freed from want. In the midst of their plenty they are proud to see Kris, and there is a strong probability that he and Tuna may not be long separated.

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